

FRENCH
LITERATURE

BY
M. BARING

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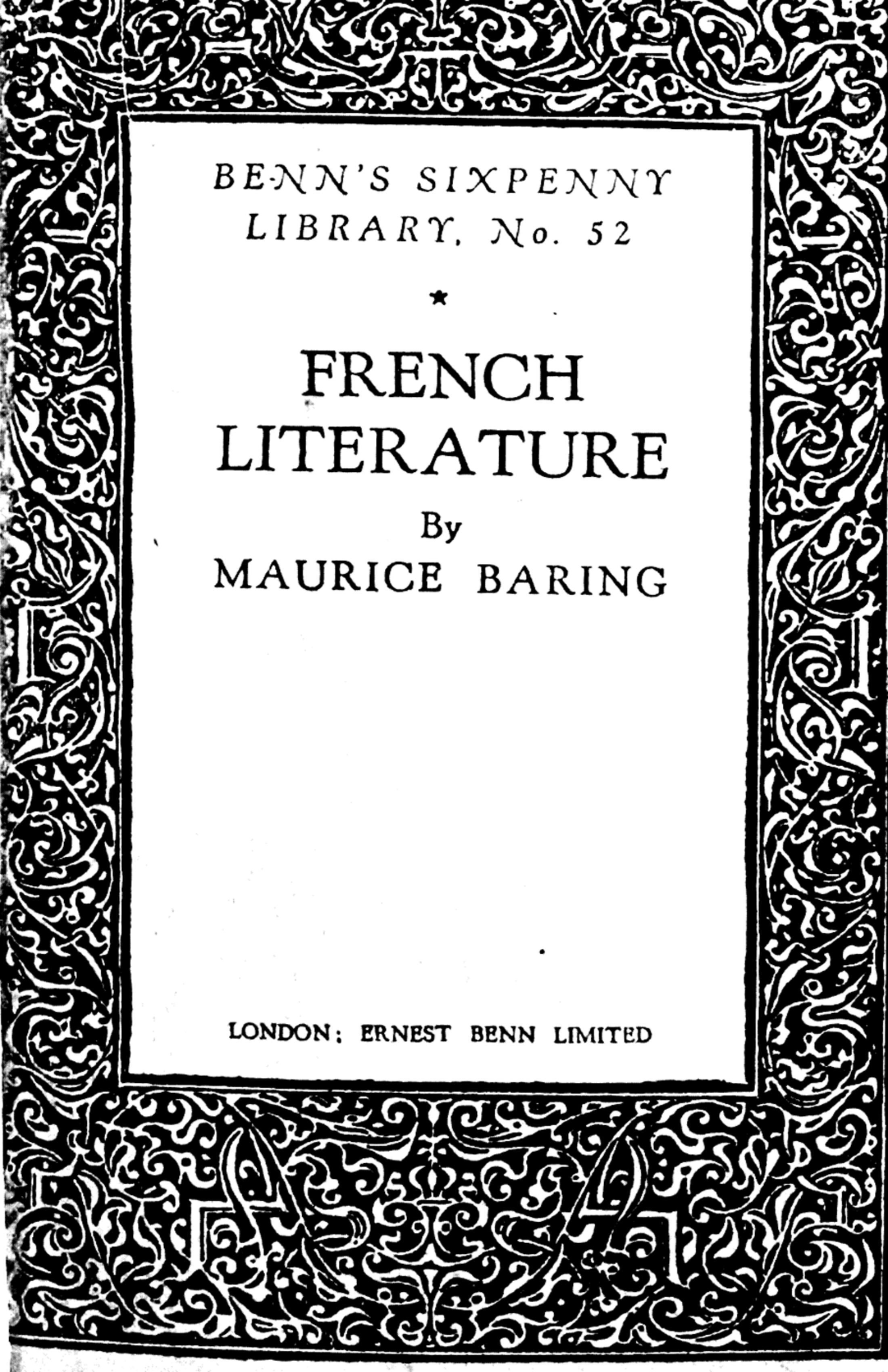
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FRENCH LITERATURE

By MAURICE BARING



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FRENCH LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGINS

FRANCE, in spite of her Frankish name and her Roman organisation, was, and is, Gaul. The characteristics of the Gallic race, such as they are said to be, as far back as we can trace them, persisted throughout her history and are still evident, in spite of the march of progress and the havoc of successive revolutions.

The French nation was fashioned of various elements; many alien ingredients went to the making of the pudding, but the original Gallic leaven never disappeared. We are told by the Romans that the chief characteristics of the Gallic genius were love of warfare and activity of mind: their two ruling passions were to fight and to talk well. But if the French of to-day retain the characteristics of the Gauls, and if the Gauls were Celts, we are faced with racial problems which are beyond the scope of this book. What concerns us is the language and literature of France; and whatever the right solution of such problems may be, there is no doubt that in French literature, from its earliest origins until the present day, there are two separate and to a certain extent conflicting elements which we may call the Gallic and the Celtic; or, if this is misleading, X and Y.

In studying the French language we are at once aware of three dominant factors.

Firstly, the Latin. The Romans conquered Gaul and imported their laws and their language, or rather their languages. Classical Latin, with its tincture of Greek scholarship, was taught in the schools, and the people caught the vernacular of the merchants and the slaves of the soldiery.

Secondly, the Celtic language or languages. They were supplanted and driven into the corners of the country, where they slumbered until the sixth century; but this does not mean that the Celtic influence was eliminated.

Thirdly, there was the influence of the Barbarians. The Barbarians invaded France and overthrew the outward structure of Roman civilisation. They disorganised and decomposed the Latin language; they broke it to pieces, and on its ruins a Romance language grew up—French. The terminations and the cases of synthetic Latin were discarded, and the language became analytical. The Franks contributed not more than about a hundred words to the language, for as soon as they conquered the country they began to talk Latin, which they learnt from the Church, in whose faith they were baptised. A Romance language definitely different from Latin, and talked of as such, can be first traced in the eighth century in the **glossaries of Reichenau and Cassel**, and the **Oaths of Strasbourg (842)**, and the **Sequence of Sainte-Eulalie (about 880)**. By this time the French language was a living thing, which had arisen from the needs of the people and corresponded to them. But as this new Romance language grew like a plant on the ruins of Latin, it split up into a variety of dialects,

which fell into two main separate groups—the *langue d'oc* and the *langue d'oïl* (Provençal and French). They were separated, roughly speaking, by a line drawn from the mouth of the Gironde to the Alps, passing through the following places: Limoges, Clermont-Ferrand, and Grenoble. South of this line was the region of the *langue d'oc*, which was, and remains, a separate language, and is outside the scope of this book. North of the line the language of the Roman Gaul split up into various dialects—Norman, Burgundian, Picard, and the language of the centre, the Duchy of France, French. French became the language of the royal domain, of the powerful house of Capet, spread with it, and followed its fortunes.

CHAPTER II

THE MIDDLE AGES

Chansons de Geste.—The literature of the Middle Ages, which seeded itself in the ruins of Latin, bore its first visible fruits in the tenth century. This was the epoch of great sagas or epics, which were sung and declaimed by *jongleurs*—the *Chansons de Geste*. They centred round the history and tradition of France, and especially round the exploits of Charlemagne and his knights. Others, the *Romans Bretons*, sang King Arthur and his knights; and there was a further classical cycle, which celebrated the heroes of antiquity. Of these narrative epics, one of the *Chansons de Geste* is the most famous and the finest—the **Chanson de**

Roland (about 1080). It tells of the last battle fought by Charlemagne, "Charlemagne à la barbe fleurie" (bramble-bearded Charlemagne), and his knight Roland in the Pass of Roncevaux, of Roland's betrayal and death. In spite of a certain monotony, which is far removed from the large, easy brushwork of Homer, or the flaming strokes of Dante, the *Chanson de Roland* is an imposing monument, and certain passages, such as Bishop Turpin's benediction to the dying, and the death of Roland, are great, with the true epic quality of pathos, simplicity, and restraint. They are enhanced by the rough rhythms and the almost halting utterance of couplets that seem to climb slowly and thus increase the suspense and dramatic intensity of the narrative. In the Arthurian cycle the most notable work is that of Chrétien de Troyes, written at the end of the twelfth century. He wrote facile verse and lent elegance to the legends of King Arthur. *Chansons de Geste* continued to be sung throughout the whole of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Joinville (about 1224-1318).—In the thirteenth century we see the dawn of history in the work of Joinville, a friend of St. Louis, who told the story of the Ninth Crusade in naïve and picturesque language. **Villehardouin** (born between 1150 and 1164; died 1213) told the story of the Fourth Crusade. He was a realist. He wrote *choses vues*. He recorded with simplicity and not without greatness the extraordinary and sometimes momentous events that he witnessed.

Lyrical and Popular Poetry.—During these centuries there was no lyrical poetry, except south of the Loire, among the Latins, where the poets were called *troubadours*; but in the north there was at least

one lyric poet, Thibaud de Campagne, and Rutebeuf, a contemporary of St. Louis, a remarkable writer, and a master of many styles—lyric, satiric, dramatic, religious; he was a kind of journalist of the epoch. He might have been a great poet, had he lived later when the language had become more supple and better suited to the needs of literature. In the thirteenth century, in contrast to the *Chansons de Geste*, which were aristocratic, the **Romans de Renart** were popular in every sense of the word; they were satirical poems dealing with everyday life, delineating human types under the names of animals. Each of these *romans* is like an expanded fable of La Fontaine.

The Fabliaux.—Parallel with these were the *Fabliaux*—anecdotes and stories dealing with bourgeois life, realistically and in the manner of La Fontaine's *Contes*. They are satirical, but sometimes delicate, and if *Aucassin et Nicolette* (a *chante-fable*) can be classed among the *Fabliaux*, exquisite. They are certainly the most delightful and racy productions of ancient French literature.

The Roman de la Rose has been considered the most important work of the thirteenth century. It was the work of two authors: the first 40,000 lines were written by Guillaume de Lorris about 1237; half a century later, Jean de Meung added another 18,000 lines. The first part was in imitation of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, in the form of an allegorical narrative. Into the second part the poet poured out a mass of learning and philosophy which is sometimes surprisingly daring and in advance of his epoch. Meung has been compared with Rabelais, and for two centuries the poem was sufficiently alive to be either loved or hated. In the fourteenth century, history is adorned by Froissart,

a picturesque, uncritical chronicler and the most impartial of war correspondents; and theology has a great name in Gerson, a learned doctor and eloquent preacher, to whom the *Imitation of Christ* has sometimes been attributed.

François Villon.—The fifteenth century is more or less barren, except for the gracious lyrics of Charles d'Orleans and François Villon (born 1431). François Villon was a robber, an assassin, a vagabond, and a poet. He touched many chords—irony, humour, passion, and pathos. He is one of the first and one of the rare truly lyrical poets of France. His best-known poem is the *Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis*, but his power, his pathos, and his sincerity find their strongest expression, and his plangent notes are most poignantly heard, in *l'Építaphe en forme de Ballade*, which he made for himself and his companions when they were expecting to be hanged.

Mysteries and Moralities.—During the Middle Ages the stage came to life. In the tenth century, and perhaps earlier, religious subjects were performed in the churches; but in the twelfth century a popular drama already existed outside the Church. Small dramas were performed; subjects were taken from Scripture or from the lives of the saints. The drama went on developing throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; immensely long dramatic poems were acted, which took days to perform. These were the *Mysteries* or *Miracles*. They were a mixture of tragedy and comedy, and centred round some event in sacred or national history. There was a comic drama as well—light comedies called *farces*, *soties*, and *moralités*. The drama of the Middle Ages was alive, racy, and native, well suited to the needs of the public,

for whom, and to a certain extent by whom, it was written.

Philippe de Commynes (1447-1511).—Before taking leave of the fifteenth century, Philippe de Commynes must be mentioned. He was Louis XI.'s historian, a chamberlain and councillor to three Kings of France, a statesman, and an aristocrat. He wrote history with the knowledge of a man of the world and a politician; he had a taste for ideas and psychology and a sense of the philosophy of history, and he wrote with a limpidity surprising for the epoch.

CHAPTER III

THE RENAISSANCE

THE sixteenth century brought to France a renaissance in literature.

In every European country in which a renaissance of letters occurred it was due to the discovery of classical literature by the lettered class. This pouring of old culture into new bottles sometimes strengthened and sometimes weakened the native receptacles; it depended upon the wine-skins—that is to say, the temperament of the countries into which the new spirit was poured. We are first aware of the new trend and of an altered outlook in the works of **Clément Marot (1496 or 1497-1544)**. In his work there is a hitherto unknown quality of wit, as well as conscious art and refinement. Saint-Gelais was ranked by his contemporaries with Marot, but, except for having transplanted the sonnet from Italy, his work has little interest for us now.

François Rabelais (1495 (?) - 1553).—The first great name which confronts us in the Renaissance is that of François Rabelais. In his two prose epics, *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* (1533 and 1535), a series of preposterous adventures, shot with erudition and the brilliance of a powerful intellect, and told with a mastery of the art of narration that has never been surpassed, there are flashes of philosophy which some critics think have been overestimated. His work quakes with a pervading and immense humour and a gigantic and ever-present exaggeration, both in the manner and in the matter of what he writes, and especially in the coarseness of the language he uses. He has been called “the Homer of Buffoonery.” He has a genius for piling up synonyms and for creating grotesque names, and he riots in picturesque, fantastic words and catalogues, in wild panegyrics and pæans of food and drink; but often he is serious. The meaning and purpose of his books have given rise to endless theory and controversy; but whatever was or was not their intention, there is no doubt that Rabelais is the supreme and gigantic embodiment of the spirit, the exuberant vitality and humour of the Renaissance, and of the riotous reaction from the formalism of the Middle Ages.

Behind a grotesque mask of caricature Rabelais concealed a Shakespearean knowledge of human nature; and his prose, when he is speaking seriously, was not equalled until many years later.

The Pléiade.—In the second half of the sixteenth century came a renaissance of poetry. It is centred in what was called the *Pléiade*. The *Pléiade* were a group of poets—Ronsard, du Bellay, Pontus de Tyard, Baïf, Jodelle, Daurat, and Belleau. They aimed

at writing in French masterpieces which should rival those of classical literature.

In 1549, du Bellay published the manifesto of the group, the *Défense et Illustration de la Langue Française*, and Ronsard published his *Odes* in 1550. The *Pléiade* were a group of aristocrats and scholars. They despised the current forms of literature as being too pedestrian and easy, too popular. *Odi profanum vulgus* was their watchword, and they acted up to it. They introduced new forms: odes modelled on those of Horace, sonnets instead of *dizains*, and tragedy and comedy in the place of *moralités* and *farces*. It was not their aim to abolish the French language, but rather to strengthen and reform it; to borrow what they could from Greece and Rome, but to write French—a richer French, but not the easy language of the vulgar; they considered that the vernacular could not provide rich enough material for poetry. A finer one was necessary for the goldsmith's work they dreamed of, and exotic stones for their poetic jewellery. They were in favour of borrowing classical terms so long as such borrowings were based on a real knowledge of Latin and Greek. They would not, as the moderns do, derive a word half from the Greek and half from the Latin.

They boldly coined words imitated from Greek and Latin. They advocated the return to a purely French vocabulary, as people now advocate the purging of English from journalese. The present Poet Laureate* would have fitted into their group and endorsed their theories. They did not shrink from using expressive words culled from all French dialects, and even from

* 1927. Mr. Bridges.

patois, or from using technical words borrowed from the arts and crafts, so long as they were picturesque. Ronsard declared that if any ancient terms which had fallen into disuse had left shoots, these shoots should be layered and cultivated, so that they might grow once more. In a word, their aim was to enrich, prune, and strengthen the language, so that, like a carefully tended vine, it might produce good grapes. They sought everywhere for anything that could enrich the soil, and spared no trouble in their vine culture.

It cannot be said that they succeeded in rivalling the masterpieces of Greece and Rome, but they left behind them a mass of beautiful poetry. They revolutionised the language, they created modern French, and supplied the romantics of the nineteenth century with their weapons for their insurrection against the tyranny of the eighteenth century.

Ronsard (1524-1585).—Ronsard, the most famous member of the *Pléiade*, left behind him a mass of unequal work—a tedious epic and some ponderous imitations of Pindar; but certain of his epical fragments attain to greatness; many of his lyrics are exquisite, and his sonnets are faultless. Some of these, such as the famous

Quand vous serez bien vieille,

have a proud and noble elegance, like the shimmer of Vandyk's satins or an air of Mozart's. They are close-woven and without a dropped stitch. Sometimes, too, they have an attic grace:

La Parque t'a tuée et cendre tu reposes.

Sometimes his lines have a gleaming decision:

Je te salue, heureuse et profitable mort.

Du Bellay's sonnets have the same decisive craftsmanship; they are among the finest in the French language, and his lyric *Les Vanneurs* has a grace and a simple delicacy that is not to be found outside the French language; there is nothing in any literature which is at the same time so light and so poetically suggestive. It is rivalled by Belleau's *Avril*. Besides the members of the *Pléiade* there was, at the same time, a whole nest of singing birds, and among them Louise Labé, the greatest poetess of the sixteenth century, and perhaps the greatest French poetess. Her passionate sonnets remind us of Shakespeare's and the lyrics of Catullus.

In the second half of the sixteenth century the most notable of the writers of prose were translators, such as Amyot, who translated Plutarch, writers on religion, such as Calvin, politicians like La Boétie, and writers of memoirs, such as Brantôme. But the greatest among the prose writers of this period is Montaigne, one of the two or three greatest of all writers of French prose.

Montaigne (1533-1592).—Montaigne's first two books of essays appeared in 1580.

Whether Montaigne coined the word "essay" or not, it is certain that he created the thing. He is the most desultory and personal of writers. His ever-present common sense is tempered by wit and irradiated by imagination. He tells us an enormous amount about himself and his private affairs.

"Le monde regarde toujours vis à vis; moi je replie ma veue au dedans, je la plante, je m'amuse là. Chacun regarde devant soi, moi je regarde dedans moi: je n'ay affaire qu'à moi, je me considere sans cesse, je me controle, je me gouste."

The most companionable of writers, Montaigne has always attracted the overweening affection of many readers, in the same way as Charles Lamb and R. L. Stevenson, and for the same reason he has been underrated by such readers who are impatient with what they consider "all that sentimental fuss."

Montaigne provides food for all shades of thought and for all moods. He is at times a stoic, at times an epicurean, often sceptical, and always wise. His scepticism was not that of a savage satirist or a tortured thinker; it is that of an onlooker who has sown his wild oats freely in his youth, and who, from the seclusion of his library, looks back and down at life with an ironical understanding and without surprise. His style is not only discursive, but in the highest degree allusive. He quotes the classics on almost every page. The titles of his essays seldom give you a clue to their true subject; but his discursiveness enabled him to avoid the great pitfall of Renaissance writers, the long-winded sentence. This brings us to a matter of capital importance—his style. It has been said that Montaigne was neither a great artist nor a great philosopher. "He was not great at all," Mr. Lytton Strachey says in his excellent outline of French literature. If by "great" we mean profound or "tremendously introspective," this is, no doubt, true. Montaigne was neither a Swift, a Rousseau, a Pascal, nor a Dostoyevsky; but there is a greatness in things light as well as in things heavy. It needs a great cook to make a perfect omelet. Pascal sums the matter up better than anyone else:

"Ce que Montaigne a de bon ne peut être acquis que difficilement. Ce qu'il a de mauvais (j'entends hors les mœurs) eût peut être corrigé en un moment,

si on l'eût averti qu'il faisoit trop d'histoires, et qu'il parloit trop de soi."

Montaigne's style had a far-reaching and continuous interest. He was never discredited. Throughout periods of reform and counter-reform his prose remained a well of pure French, French as she was and is spoken by the cultivated, not by the pedants or the journalists. In all countries and in all languages writers who can succeed in writing their language as it is spoken, purely and without slovenliness, racily and yet with elegance, are rare.

Montaigne could be eloquent as well as colloquial, and his prose, always as natural and as easy as the melodies of Rossini, was sometimes strong and serious. He is one of those writers of the past whom we call "modern." When we read in Cicero's letters of the oppressive presence of Julius Cæsar at a dinner-party, or in Pliny's letters how often a sentence in a letter creates a false impression which a word of conversation (were the correspondents to meet) would put right, we say: "How modern!" What we mean is: "How human!" When Montaigne writes of his friend, "Si on me presse de dire pourquoy je l'aymois, je sens que cela ne peut s'exprimer, qu'en répondant: parce que c'estoit lui, parce que c'estoit moy," we say: "How modern!" We really mean that there is no ancient or modern about the matter; it is human and beautiful.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

DURING the first half of the seventeenth century, literature remained in the same rut in which the writers of the sixteenth century had left it. There are more poets who might have belonged to the *Pléiade*: Agrippa d'Aubigné, Théophile Viaud, Cyrano de Bergerac, the fantastic precursor of Molière, the anacreontic St. Amand, and Desportes, who translated and improved on the work of the poets of the sixteenth century; witness his sonnet on *Icarus*, translated from the Italian of Sannasaro.

Régnier (1573-1613). — At the close of the century we have a great satirist, Régnier, a disciple of Horace and Juvenal. Bold and sometimes crude, he won the approval of Boileau and Malherbe, although he upheld the tradition of Ronsard. His satires surpassed all that had hitherto been written. He was a strong writer, rhetorical, epigrammatical, and humorous; a biting caricaturist. In criticising Malherbe's reforms, he wrote:

Froids à l'imaginer; car s'ils font quelque chose
C'est proser de la rime et rimer de la prose,

which recalls Byron's

And both by precept and example shows
That prose is verse and verse is merely prose.

The Précieux. — We then come to the *Précieux*, the euphuists of the day, in search of conceits and the

unexpected, and the *Burlesques*, revelling in buffoonery, parody, and the absurd. Voiture was a representative of the former, Scarron of the latter. But out of this chaos of conceit and extravagance arose reason, clarity, and order. "Enfin Malherbe vint." Malherbe came and brought about a strong reaction.

Malherbe (1555-1628) had few disciples and no partisans during his lifetime, but nevertheless his posthumous influence was great, and his example was followed forty years later. The bulk of his work is slender; he is known chiefly by his elegy (or rather by one line in it) to Du Périer on the loss of his daughter; but he represents a reaction that we come across again and again in the course of French literature—the counter-revolution of order, taste, and perspicuity against the riot of licence, extravagance, obscurity, and absurdity, the revolt of the Latin element against the extravagances of the Celtic strain. He has always been underrated in England. His style is purity itself, and sometimes he achieves a high, rare melody; for instance, in lines like

La moisson de nos champs lassera la faucille
Et les fruits passeront la promesse des fleurs.

Here you have French verse at its purest and inimitable best.

The Drama.—During the sixteenth century dramatists had either followed the traditions of the miracles and the histories, or produced imitations of Seneca and Euripides, like the work of Jodelle and of Robert Garnier. During the first half of the seventeenth century the same double tradition was maintained—popular drama in the work of Hardy and Mairet made unsuccessful attempts to restore tragedy.

In 1636, Pierre Corneille, after a few hesitating efforts, created French tragedy; but he belongs to the latter part of the century.

The Salons.—Malherbe's influence, although not directly visible on his contemporaries, was apparent in the literary salons, of which the most famous was that of the Hotel de Rambouillet, in which every conceivable matter of taste and literature was discussed, and in the enterprise, due to the protection of Richelieu, of the French Academy and its dictionary. The first half of the seventeenth century was fruitful in prose writers of importance. St. François de Sales published his *Vie Dévote* in 1608. This great fisher of souls combined rigid moral principle with a radiant warmth of sympathetic expression. Guez de Balzac lent harmony to letters in his *Socrate Chrétien*; Vaugelas drew up a code of "French as she should be spoken," and took part in the enterprise of the Académie. Descartes, the philosopher, we will consider later.

The Grand Siècle.—With the second half of the seventeenth century came the Golden Age of French literature, and with it a host of great writers both in verse and in prose.

Corneille (1606-1684).—In 1636, Corneille's *Cid* was produced. Before 1650 he had written all his best work. In writing the *Cid*, Corneille did more than create French tragedy; he created French *drama*; that is to say, he laid the foundations of the whole of French drama. After some tentative essays in the domain of fantasy, imbroglio, and buffoonery, he not only created French tragedy, but also a serious form of comedy. In so doing he laid the foundations of the drama of ordinary life, and clearly stated the theory of such a drama; but in practice he turned from the

lives and affairs of ordinary men to those of exalted historical or legendary personages.

The main characteristic of Corneille's work is truth. It is true to life. He chose historical subjects, and the stories of kings and heroes, because historical subjects are true. Truth is stranger than fiction, and all that appears to be improbable in the true story is acceptable when we know it is historical. What is not historical, says Aristotle, does not immediately appear to be possible; on the other hand, historical events are obviously possible, otherwise they would not have happened.

That is the chief reason why Corneille chose historical or legendary subjects; and even when he chose legendary subjects he eliminated the fabulous elements as far as possible and rationalised the legend. There were other reasons, no doubt. The public of his day preferred to hear about the doings of kings and heroes rather than about those of the *bourgeois*. Thirdly, the choice of exalted and powerful characters—kings and heroes who could act as they pleased, enable him to study human passions at their intensest—emancipated, that is to say, from the shackles and limitations of legality or policy, or from the blight of obscurity. If you want to study a poet, it is more interesting to study a Byron or a Shelley than a Chatterton. If you want to study an ambitious man, Napoleon is a more interesting subject than an ambitious man who has been prevented by circumstances from being anything more important than a lance-corporal or a scrivener's clerk. Thus it is that the essence of Corneille's drama is the conflict of the human will with the passions, and the triumph of the human will; hence Corneille is the great preacher of energy and the apostle of duty. His

psychology is the same as that which we find formulated in the philosophy of Descartes.

Descartes (1596-1650).—Descartes' philosophical ideas are outside the scope of this book, but his ideas were expressed in Ciceronian prose in work such as the *Discours sur la Méthode*, the *Méditation*, and the *Traité des Passions*.

The *Traité des Passions* proclaims the theory of will. Will, Descartes tells us, is so free that it can never be restrained, and that even the most feeble souls can acquire an absolute control over their passions, should they take the trouble to discipline and to direct them. The last sentence contains the whole of Corneille's psychology.

In Corneille's plays, plot for plot's sake, intrigue and surprise, and the tricks of melodrama, are not to be found. His plots are either the result of, or a support or an excuse for, his psychological machinery.

It has been said that Corneille's work was cramped and to a certain degree thwarted by the dramatic conventions of his time, and by the convention of the unities; that, had he been an Englishman, his genius would have found a wider scope and a greater ease in the freer atmosphere of the English stage. We may doubt whether this is true. About the unities of time, place, and action he agreed with the public, in holding that they were reasonable and lent probability to the drama. Corneille aimed at a minimum of variation in the duration of time, and in place, because the less the variation, the greater the illusion of probability. But these minima are relative and not absolute, and depend on the nature of the subject. When a subject is in itself concentrated, unity and a maximum of probability ensue; given Corneille's power of concen-

tration and love of probability, it is doubtful whether he would have applied to the subject of *Othello* in English a different method than that which he used for the *Cid* or *Polyeucte*. He observed the unities, not because they were the fashion of his epoch, but because they were the natural framework, or rather what he conceived to be true and dramatic. In fact, he did what Ibsen did in plays such as *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler*; he achieved the maximum of unity and probability by means of minimum variation of time and place. He did this, not only because he was born in the reign of Louis XIV., but because he was a dramatist of a peculiar kind. He chose history, and especially Roman history, because what interested him most was politics and the problems arising out of them. In this he resembles Goethe and Bernard Shaw. For in his dramas that deal with Roman history Corneille painted the political life of his period as surely as Goethe did in his *Tasso* and *Egmont*, and as Bernard Shaw in *John Bull's Other Island*. He has been decried in comparison with Racine for a want of subtlety, for being unable to render the shades of the soul, for not being sensitive.

But Corneille painted his contemporaries, not only as he saw them, but as others saw them. The men of his time were men of action, forceful, and full of will; the women were intellectual rather than sentimental. The whole of the moral machinery behind Corneille's work can be summed up in the word "will," the workings of will. His most famous plays are: *Le Cid*, *Horace*, *Polyeucte*, *Cinna*, *Nicomède*, *Psyché* [in collaboration with Molière], and a comedy, *Le Menteur*. He wrote many others (*Rodogune*, *Sophonisbe*, *Tite et Bérénice*, *Héraclius*, and *Œdipe*). In all

these tragedies the chief protagonists are faced with a problem or situation which establishes a ring for contests between the will and the passions. "Duty, duty must be done," is the moral of these plays. Corneille's finest sayings and most famous lines are affirmations of the supreme sovereignty of the will. His heroines have as much energy and determination as those of Bernard Shaw, and his heroes as much drive as the man of action whom Goethe paints; but as a dramatist he has the qualities that Goethe lacked, a sense of the stage, and another which Bernard Shaw lacks; he was a poet, and a great poet. His poetical style is hammered in steel. His dialogue is sometimes distributed in long tirades, eloquent, closely reasoned, and tight in utterance, that roll on like a tide, gathering volume and force and break with a crash; and sometimes it is broken up into a sharp rapier-play of short questions and answers, in which suddenly, in a few words, he will strike a deep final chord. "D'où vient cette froideur?" asks Polyeucte with the zeal of a newly converted Christian to an older convert. "Dieu même a craint la mort," is the answer.

His verse has a clanging sonority and a culminating power of climax that no French poet except Victor Hugo has ever equalled, and that Victor Hugo himself has never surpassed. He is the sublimest of French poets, and he never, like Victor Hugo, passes suddenly from the sublime to the ridiculous.

There is nothing plastic in his verse, nothing sensitive or picturesque, and it has little colour. But he has a strength and intellectual splendour which come from concentration of thought, a mastery of concise expression, and a logical conduct of discourse.

Besides this there is an indefinable greatness about

his work at its best which calls to mind what Molière said about him :

“ My friend Corneille has a familiar who now and then whispers in his ear the finest verses in the world, but sometimes the familiar deserts him, and then he writes no better than anyone else.” Unfortunately the familiar deserted him in the latter part of his life, and during the fourth period of his career, from 1659, the date of *Œdipe*, to 1674 (*Suréna*), his works, save for occasional passages of greatness and beauty, are almost wholly tedious.

Racine (1639-1699).—Corneille's greatest rival, Jean Racine, was born thirty years later at la Ferté Milon. The son of a bourgeois, he received a part of his education at Port Royal. His first two plays were acted in 1664 and 1665. In 1667 his *Andromaque* obtained a success as startling and epoch-making as that of *Le Cid*. It was followed by the production of six masterpieces: *Britannicus*, *Bérénice*, *Mithridate*, *Iphigénie*, *Bajazet*, and *Phèdre* (1677). His work made him enemies, and he was the victim of intrigues. His plays were attacked, and an organised opposition was made against his *Phèdre*, which was hissed. Racine left the stage in disgust. He married, was appointed historiographer to the King, and became fervently devout. Later, in 1689, he broke his silence at the request of Madame de Maintenon and wrote *Esther* and *Athalie* (his masterpiece) for the *demoiselles* of Saint-Cyr. *Esther* was produced with great magnificence (1689); *Athalie* was acted privately, without costume, in 1691, and was not seen on the stage until the *Régence*. With the exception of a few religious canticles and some stinging epigrams, Racine wrote nothing else.

Racine's reputation during his own lifetime, and repeatedly since, has suffered vicissitudes. He was from the first tightly bound to the wheel of fame; but the wheel has sometimes been in the sunlight and sometimes in the shade. Madame de Sévigné, although she never said "Racine passera comme le café," preferred Corneille. To many of his contemporaries it seemed as great a sacrilege to compare Racine with Corneille as it did to Colonel Newcome to compare Tennyson with Byron. There is something to be said for this point of view, or at least it is one that is not exclusively the sign and property of *laudatores temporis acti*. It recurs. It is sometimes endorsed by a future generation. In the eyes of his contemporaries, Pope may have ousted Dryden; later generations thought Dryden the finer poet. Tennyson ousted Byron, but later generations may agree with all Europe in thinking Byron incomparably the greater power of the two. Racine is never sublime like Corneille; and that is what Madame de Sévigné meant. Exquisite and incomparable poet as Racine is, it is possible that French literature would lack something on the whole more irreplaceable (if you review the whole extent of French literature) if shorn of the legacy of Corneille than of that of Racine. For French literature has work as exquisite in the *Fables* of La Fontaine and as psychologically delicate in the plays of Musset, but there is no substitute for Corneille's sublimity, and nothing that so forcibly represents and expresses the essentially tough, strong fibre, the will-power, and active intellectual force, which is so important a factor in the French temperament and in French history.

Racine is the complement of Corneille. His plays deal with the conflicts and contests between passion

and duty, and show the conquest of the will by the passions, and not, as do the plays of Corneille, the conquest of the passions by the will. Racine paints man as the victim of passion, and shows us the terrible disasters that ensue from this fact. He chooses more especially (although not always) the passion of Love; and the moral of his love dramas is:

The love of God, which leads to realms above
Is *contre-carré*d by the god of Love.

He agrees with Cervantes that in this contest man has no chance against the passions except in flight. Like Corneille, he observes the unities and chooses classical subjects, and like Corneille he seeks and achieves truth; but there is this difference: Racine extracts from his classical themes truths that are common to humanity in all times; he shows us human nature, not in the vice of extraordinary circumstance, not emancipated from common law and on a higher heroic scale, but the opposite: he shows us that human nature is the same everywhere, whatever the circumstances; he sets before us situations which are familiar to us all. A woman who is abandoned and who causes her lover to be murdered by a rival (the plot of *Andromaque*). A woman who is abandoned and who revenges herself on her rival and her lover (*Bajazet*). A man who from civic duty foregoes marrying the woman he loves (*Bérénice*). A step-mother in love with her stepson and persecuting him because he cannot return her love (*Phèdre*). Racine is one of the few modern dramatists who was successful in using the machinery of the Greeks and in filling the antiquated vessels with the wine of living drama. He took his plots from Euripides or other

classic writers, and filled the antique framework with pictures of human nature as he imagined it and of life as he had observed it. He had the imagination of a great poet, and the intuition of a profound psychologist, to whom the secrets of the souls of men and women are known. Thus it is that his drama dealing with men and women who were his contemporaries, in spite of their classical names, still burns with undiminished fires of passion and truth. Racine's reputation as a poet and dramatist has suffered vicissitudes in foreign countries as well as in France. It was the fashion thirty years ago in England to say that the French formal tragedy was a stilted vehicle that dealt only with types; but I postulate that French verse is an instrument of a character and nature peculiar to itself, capable, when played by a master, of yielding incomparable music. English critics may say what they please, but readers of all countries who know French well enough to appreciate the finer shades of the language are agreed on this point. The present generation of French students in England are fully conscious of this, and there has been no finer appreciation of Racine than that of Mr. Lytton Strachey.

This brings us to what in Racine is the principal stimulus of appreciation—his diction. It suits the subjects; it is simple, natural, precise, and full of feeling. "Rasant la prose," as Sainte-Beuve said. "Beau comme la prose," as someone else said. But, unlike that of Corneille, it is finely shaded. The most exquisite, the most delicately sensitive of all poetic diction; as full of rippling shadows and almost imperceptible changes of intonation and stress as Milton's blank verse, and as noble. His great "mots" and "lines" have the familiarity of everyday conversation.

As for the nobility of his style, you can take any lines at random.

J'ai voulu devant vous exposant mes remords,
Par un chemin plus lent descendre chez les morts.

But he can do more than be noble; he is subtle in his effects; he can set musical suggestions vibrating in the soul. For instance:

Je demeuray long temps errant dans Cesarée,
Lieux charmans, où mon cœur vous avoit adorée.

Or tell a whole tragedy in one echoing line. For instance:

Mais la mort fuit encor sa grande âme trompée.

The verse of Racine to a Frenchman's ears is as full of subtle beauties as that of Milton's to an Englishman's. Small wonder that they called him "Le divin Racine."

Molière (1622-1673).—Molière, the son of Jean Poquelin, a *tapissier valet de chambre*, is the name among all French writers which is best known to the world at large. He is the most French of all French writers, more French even than La Fontaine, for La Fontaine was too lyrical to be completely representative. His private life was thorny and full of trouble; he was a strolling player, and both his public and his private circumstances were hard. He is a writer of comedy whose appeal is universal, and one of the greatest comic writers that the world has ever seen. His style is sometimes careless and full of faults, due to rapidity of composition. But in spite of all that can be said against him, and with all possible reservations, Molière was not only a supremely successful playwright, but an admirable writer. His style was made

for the footlights. It gets across them and goes straight to the heart of an average audience. His verse and his prose were meant to be spoken and not to be read, and when they are well spoken they are as effective to-day as when they were first written.

Molière painted life as he saw it, objectively; his characters are true to life, but his object, which should be that of all writers of comedy, was to make them funny as well as true, to put his finger on the ludicrous side of men and affairs, and to laugh at them in such a way that his audience and readers should catch and share his mirth. Molière not only laughs at the foibles and follies which he makes so ludicrous; he lashes them as well. *Ridendo castigat mores*. His laughter is real laughter. He sees plainly the disasters into which men are led by their follies, but, while he laughs and chastises, he never grins and never sneers. He is comic, not because he says witty things; he is not witty like Beaumarchais or Congreve; but he is comic because he is able to put his finger on the ludicrous spot of a situation and to let it do its own work. The comic situation, aspect, or climax is a spring which he touches, and which sets the public laughing. This is not done by any stage trickery or skilful sword-play of words, but by the comic instinct with which he will suddenly reveal a character in a word.

All great comic writers can be divided into two classes: those who, like Aristophanes, throw light on the comic side of a situation with the beam of genius; for instance, Aristophanes, when the corpse, being told the price of his fare across the Styx, said that he would sooner be alive; or when he talks of Plutus, the blind god of riches, and a character asks: "Is he really blind?" Gilbert and Shaw have this gift.

The second class are the wits—Congreve, Beaumarchais, Dumas *filis*, and Wilde—who enchant the intelligence by the dexterity and unexpected felicity of their expression. Molière is one of the greatest of the first class.

In his finest comedies—in *Tartuffe*, *Le Misanthrope*, *Don Juan*, *Le Malade Imaginaire*—one is conscious that he was deeply aware of the sore spots in the human soul; he lets you realise this, but at the same time he never allows you to stop laughing at the ludicrous aspect, which he presents with such vigour, and at which he laughs with so natural a gaiety that you are bound to join in.

Molière's appeal is universal. *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* is still the play which draws the largest audience at the Théâtre Français on a holiday. Plays like this and *L'Avare* can be understood by children, and they are never better acted than by schoolboys.

It has been said that he draws types and not individuals. His *Harpagon* is a type, but then every real miser is a type; otherwise his characters, magnified as they are by his comic lens, are never distorted, and his *Précieuses*, his *Mascarille*, his *Scapin*, are as living and as real as Falstaff and Sam Weller.

His *Alceste* in *Le Misanthrope* is a typical individual, just as *Celimène*, the coquette, is the type of all coquettes; but she is as living as *Beatrice*.

In Molière's work we find all the French qualities that are French, and nothing but French, at their maximum. That is why, perhaps, the fame of Molière has never suffered a real eclipse in France.

Boileau (1636-1711).—The high priest of letters and the arbiter of taste in the seventeenth century was Boileau. He was sensible and witty, wrote elegant verse

with ease, and sharp and amusing satire. He was a disciple of Horace. Although not a great poet, he is an admirable critic, and he achieved the most valuable and difficult task a critic can accomplish by discerning the merits of his contemporaries. He was also an impeccable artist. He wrote French verse sometimes as well as Pope wrote English, but he lacked the flame and the impulse of inspiration that make Pope more than a critic and a satirist. He is seen at his best in lines such as these :

Seulement au printemps, quand Flore dans les plaines
Faisait taire des vents les bruyantes haleines,
Quatre bœufs attelés, d'un pas tranquille et lent,
Promenaient dans Paris le monarque indolent.

La Fontaine (1621-1695).—The greatest French *poet* of the seventeenth century is La Fontaine, one of the rarest poets of all time. His knowledge of human nature was as profound as his appreciation of Nature was sensitive. He is sometimes deep and sometimes gay, and at times exquisitely melancholy and elegiac. He is always a supreme artist in words, and he handles the French language with an easy mastery, a perfect knowledge of its racy possibilities and native savour, its musical modes, in a way which no Frenchman did until the advent of Victor Hugo.

In the guise of animals, in his little fables, he describes the whole life of the *Grand Siècle*, and especially the life of the Court; but not only the life of the Court. His work, even more than that of Balzac, deserves the name of the *Comédie humaine*. He is a realist. He looks on at life without illusions, and finds it a sorry spectacle, but he makes the best of it. Common sense, charity, and tolerance are the only

lubricants for such creaking, clumsy machinery; but they will carry one a long way. The world he paints for us is more cruel than that which Mowgli found in the jungle and outside it. The icy flippancy of his Fourmi is more pitiless than the coils of Kipling's Kaa; but there are redeeming features. The world is very beautiful, and no one ever recorded the lovely sights of Nature more faithfully or more delicately. La Fontaine found nothing in life but *un vain bruit et l'amour*, but then *l'amour* went a long way. La Fontaine was called by his contemporaries "The Inimitable"; and inimitable he has remained. The judgment has never been reversed. His style is as delicate and as economical as the work of Corot's brush, his wit as unobtrusive and as delicate as a thread of gossamer on a September morning. But his style is racy as well as delicate; it is lucid, solid, and sensible, and has a savour of the soil, the fields, the farm-house, the vines, and the cider-press. Two lines are enough to show his exquisite and incomparable art:

Dans le cristal d'une fontaine
Un cerf se mirant autrefois, . . .

Or to convince oneself of his vivid grasp of the outward aspect of things, one has only to read his fable, *Le Coche et la Mouche*, which begins:

Dans un chemin montant, sablonneux, malaisé,
Et de tous les côtés au soleil exposé,
Six forts chevaux tiraient un coche.

La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680).—In the second part of the seventeenth century the prose writers are legion. A few of them are great. There is La Roche-

foucauld, who in a small book of short maxims concentrated the observation of a lifetime. His thought is often profound, and his sentences have the sharpness and brilliance of diamonds. Bitter as they appear, and although he may perhaps overstate "*l'infinita vanita del tutto*," nobody who is over forty will read La Rochefoucauld without realising that his sayings have a personal and sometimes an intimate application; for instance :

Nous arrivons tout nouveaux aux divers âges de la vie.

Cardinal de Retz wrote vivid memoirs, and he, too, clothed wisdom in gleaming phrase.

Pascal (1623-1662).—There are in this epoch five prose writers of the first rank, who put all the others into the shade—Pascal, Bossuet, Madame de Sévigné, La Bruyère, and Fénelon. Pascal was a scholar, a trained scientist, a mathematician, a geometer, and a student of physics. He invented a calculating machine at the age of nineteen. At the age of thirty-three he abandoned science and letters, which he despised, but in so doing he in a sense created French prose. The reason of this is that he had something to say; and what he had to say was, to him, all-important. It generally happens that the finest prose writers are those who have something to say and wish to say it as clearly as possible, and not those who have nothing to say and who are intent on saying it exquisitely. Witness, besides Pascal himself, Renan, and, in English, Newman. "*Quand on voit le style naturel, on est tout étonné et ravi; car on s'attendait voir un auteur, et on trouve un homme.*" This saying of Pascal's applies to himself. We find in his work a man. What he had to say was his profession

of faith and an apology for Christianity. To defend the Jansenists against the Jesuits, he wrote the *Provinciales* (1656), which is considered by some (but not by all) critics to be the first monument of classical French prose. However that may be, it is a masterpiece of wit, irony, humour, and eloquence. Pascal died young, at the age of thirty-nine; he left behind him notes on various subjects, chiefly on religion, philosophy, and morals, which were to go to the making of an apology of Christian religion. These notes prove him to be a great Christian philosopher, a profound moralist, and not only a marvellous and eloquent writer, but a great lyrical poet. Madame de Staël said that in the classical literature of France there were no lyrical poets except among the writers of prose. As a genius he was among the greatest of France, and one of the greatest that the world has ever seen, on the same plane as Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Nowhere, except perhaps in the Book of Job, has the misery of mankind been expressed in more poignant and profounder accents than in Pascal's *Pensées*.

“Qu'on s'imagine un nombre d'hommes dans les chaines, et tous condamnés à la mort, dont les uns étant chaque jour égorgés à la vue des autres, ceux qui restent voient leur propre condition dans celle de leurs semblables, et, se regardant les uns les autres avec douleur et sans espérance, attendent leur tour; c'est l'image de la condition des hommes.”

No one ever proclaimed with more startling clearness and certainty that the sole hope of man is to be found in the revelation of Jesus Christ. No one ever expressed more forcibly the paradox of man's dual nature.

What makes Pascal's thoughts so poignant is that his towering intelligence never led him into pride, but only into a deeper consciousness of man's littleness, and perhaps his most famous saying is: "Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connoit pas."

Bossuet (1627-1704).—Bossuet is the greatest of all French orators. He was a great preacher. We have only the rough drafts of his sermons, but they are enough to prove his unrivalled eloquence. He preached all his life, and his themes were, for the greater part, an explanation of dogma. He put dogma before all things as the foundation of morals; morals were their practical consequence.

He preached several panegyrics and funeral orations, on Henriette D'Angleterre, Henriette de France, and the Prince de Condé, which are all of them lyrical poems, splendid pæans of sorrow and piety. He wrote several controversial books, a *Histoire des Variations des Églises Protestantes*, and *Querelle du quiétisme*, in which he displayed brilliant dialectical gifts. In his *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle* he traces the designs of Providence in the history of humanity and of the world—the sequence of religions and the rise and fall of empires. The mistakes which he made were those of his epoch, and in spite of them Bossuet's work is a great landmark in the history of French literature. He marks the moment not only when the religion which he taught, but the Grand Manner of French classical prose, were at their zenith. His saving qualities were common sense and a love of truth. His whole work can be said to be the facing of the fact of mortality and the palliation of the fact—immortality. From his contemplation of the frailty of

human things we get his tenderness and his sympathy, from his recognition of the Divine Providence his final optimism.

Madame de Sévigné (1626-1696).—Madame de Sévigné wrote letters to her daughter and to her friends. She is the queen of letter writers, and above the best of kings. Her letters are witty, picturesque, and vivid, and have the essential quality of good letters; they tell you the small or the great things that have happened, as she has seen them or heard them, in a way which makes you see and hear them. They have the naturalness and life of conversation, and they are written in the raciest and most nervous and native French.

La Bruyère (1644-1696).—La Bruyère translated *Theophrastus*. In his *Caractères* he wrote maxims and painted portraits. His philosophy could be summed up in one of his sentences: *La vie est courte, et ennuyeuse*. He insists over and over again: life is tedious, and man is restless and for ever seeking rest, and only finding it when he dies.

His maxims, although his field of observation is a larger one, have not the lightning-like penetration of La Rochefoucauld, nor the profundity of Pascal's thoughts, nor of Montaigne's wit. He is neither a deep nor a startlingly original thinker, but he is a pitiless, sometimes a pitiful, and always an impartial observer of the average man. He remains on a commonplace level. He paints the society in which he lives, and the average man with whom he was familiar, in living colours:

“Titius assiste à la lecture d'un testament avec des yeux rouges et humides, et le cœur serré de la perte de celui dont il espère recueillir la succession.”

But sometimes his phrases have a musical tenderness. For instance:

“Un beau visage est le plus beau de tous les spectacles; et l'harmonie la plus douce est le son de voix de celle que l'on aime.”

His style marks the transition between the two centuries and prepares us for the prose of Voltaire. Although La Bruyère can handle the long period with perfect mastery, he generally prefers to break it up. Following the lead of La Rochefoucauld, he sealed the use of the short, concise sentence. His fault as a writer is that he wrote too well. His influence as a stylist was deeply felt during the following fifty years, and probably long after—perhaps until the present day. It is La Bruyère who taught the French to write *too* well; and some of the most modern of French writers are still suffering from an example which it is difficult to emulate and impossible to ignore.

Fénelon (1651-1715).—The last great representative of the seventeenth century was Fénelon. Two strong links attached him to his century—a love of antiquity and the Catholic faith. He was Archbishop of Cambrai and, like Bossuet, a preacher and a formidable polemical writer. He was the tutor of the heir to the throne, and for the Dauphin, the Duc de Bourgogne, he wrote *Télémaque*, a book as famous as *Gulliver's Travels*.

Télémaque was meant to instil into his pupil a love of antiquity and such moral lessons as were suited for one in so august a station.

Fénelon had certainly no ironical intention, yet *Télémaque* is a scathing indictment of the reign of Louis XIV. The book is full of beauty. He also wrote *Fables* and *Dialogues of the Dead*. Fénelon was

a great gentleman and a great poet. He was absorbed in the past, but what he left to the world was a shadow of coming events.

CHAPTER V

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Fontenelle (1657-1757).—The eighteenth century in France was heralded by La Bruyère and inaugurated by Fontenelle, a nephew of Corneille. Fontenelle began by writing lifeless tragedies, but he soon showed he was a witty man who had something to say. He showed his wit in his *Dialogues des Morts* and in his *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes (Habitable)*; in his *Histoire des Oracles* he popularised science and scientific principles, and attacked the miraculous basis of Christianity. In so doing he laid the foundations of half-baked education, by making people believe that everything can be explained, and that the inexplicable is simply the unexplained. His *Éloges des Savants*, written when he was secretary to the Académie des Sciences, is a history of science during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as far as 1740.

Bayle (1647-1706).—Bayle, an exile, lived in Holland, and as a journalist and a lexicographer exercised a still greater influence; in his dictionary he preached absolute scepticism. Fontenelle and Bayle were the two heralds of the new age; but Vauvenargues (1715-1747), a detached moralist, forms the most solid link between Fénelon and Rousseau.

In verse there is nothing worthy of great attention during the first half of the eighteenth century. La

Motte, famous in his time as a lyric poet, is now forgotten. J. B. Rousseau wrote frigid lyrics, and Voltaire wrote the equally frigid *Henriade*.

The Drama.—There were several dramatic poets. Crébillon wrote violent plays which fell into neglect, and **Regnard**, a disciple of Molière, had a vein of original comic genius. His plays, *Le Joueur*, *Le Légataire universelle*, and *Le Retour imprévu*, have never lost their vitality.

The most important dramatist of this epoch is La Chaussée. He created the domestic drama on the foundation that Corneille had foreseen and outlined; that is to say, he made plays (in verse), not about kings and heroes, but about citizens of everyday life.

Montesquieu (1689-1755).—The prose writers of this epoch are more important. First of all, there is Montesquieu. In his *Lettres Persanes*, which appeared in 1721, he imagines two Persians visiting Europe and Paris during the last years of the reign of Louis XIV., and he gives us their impressions on French civilisation. Every phase of life and manners is reflected in these letters; he passes from lively to severe, and from the most serious to the most frivolous topics. His whole work is an attack on the Government of Louis XIV., the abuses of the Court, the nobility, finance, and law; in a word, the old régime. The moral of his work is that all monarchies end either in a republic or in despotism. In *l'Esprit des Lois* he writes political philosophy, and in *Grandeur et Décadence des Romains* philosophical history.

Montesquieu was influenced by a stay in England, and his interpretation of English institutions, which was not always correct, had an enormous influence. It is indeed difficult to estimate the influence which

he exercised on Voltaire, Rousseau, and the writers of the eighteenth century. As a writer he is terse and brilliant; he hits the nail on the head and is never at a loss for a definition.

Lesage (1668-1747) and Saint-Simon (Mémoires written 1740 and later) were contemporaries of Montesquieu. Saint-Simon describes the daily life of the Court of Louis XIV. with extraordinary vigour; his style is full of lapses, but never lacking in vividness.

Lesage, in the purest and easiest eighteenth-century French, told Spanish tales which were full of first-hand impressions of Parisian life, and in his *Gil Blas* he wrote the first realistic *picaresque* novel.

L'Abbé Prévost (1697-1763) wrote a great many tedious tales of adventure, but he happened on the story of *Manon Lescaut* (perhaps it is a true story) and wrote a masterpiece, which is as affecting now as when it was written.

Voltaire wrote his history of Charles XII., a great example of a record of the past based on the study of documents, and in his *Lettres Philosophiques* he wrote contemporary history with passionate interest.

Marivaux (1688-1763) carried on the tradition of Racine; his fantastic, finely observed, and delicate comedies still hold the stage. They have given a word to the French language—namely, *marivaudage*, which means a bandying with fancy that verges on the precious, and which later came to be synonymous with affectation. His best-known plays are *Le Legs*, *Les Fausses confidences*, *l'Épreuve*, and *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*.

Voltaire (1694-1778).—The second half of the eighteenth century is dominated by Voltaire. Voltaire,

indeed, dominated the whole century. He was first talked of in 1714, and he died in 1778; but during the first half of the century his influence was purely literary; until 1755 he was famous as a poet and a dramatist. After 1755 until his death he became world famous as a philosopher, a pamphleteer, and the foremost adversary of religion and the old régime.

Voltaire, whose real name was François Arouet, was the son of a notary; he was educated by the Jesuits, who taught him how to think, and instilled into him the principles of taste, which he never forgot. As Anatole France says somewhere, the only weapons which the Church finds dangerous are those which she has forged herself. He was twice imprisoned in the Bastille, and at least twice beaten by personal enemies. He went to England as an exile, returned to France (to Cirey, on the frontier), made friends with the King of Prussia, lived at Berlin, quarrelled with him, and finally settled down in Switzerland at Les Délices and Ferney. He returned to Paris in his old age, and died a year after in and of a blaze and apotheosis of popularity.

As this is a review of the literature and not of the history of France, the far-reaching influence of Voltaire on French history is beyond its scope; but even if we judge him from the point of view of literature alone, the importance of Voltaire remains enormous. It is easy to detail his limitations. He had all the vanities and all the faults that come from irritable and irritated nerves; he summed up in himself all the possible weaknesses of the *genus irritabile vatum*. He was as savage and unreliable as Pope, and almost as great an invalid; capable at the same time of servility and insolence. But . . . he was a good

friend, a friend of the poor, and, what is still rarer, of the needy, a defender of the innocent and of the oppressed. He had the real sense of justice; he was charitable and generous. His purse was open, but he could only give physical, and never moral, medicine; he had no balm for the suffering soul, because he did not understand its malady. He was never a comforter of the sorrowful. And yet it was not only his reason and his logic that were shocked by injustice; it was his spirit. He had a passionate sense of injustice, which burnt in his frail being like a flame. He rehabilitated the calumniated dead, as in the *Affaire Calas*, and he protected the persecuted living (*Affaire Sirven*). The limitations of his character are reflected in his work and in his art. The greatest things escape his notice: he has no sense of mystery, no historic vision, although he is an admirable writer of history; that is to say, he had an unrivalled capacity for collecting, sorting, and presenting historical facts. He ignored religion, he had no sense of poetry, and no appreciation for what was greatest in art. He worshipped the goddess of reason, but he created her in his own image; nor did he believe she could be manifested otherwise.

What, then, is the secret of Voltaire's greatness? In the first place, his supremely acute and active intelligence, his insatiable curiosity. In the second place, his energy, his activity. He had the courage and the restlessness of a fly, and the sting of a wasp. His style reflects all his faults and all his qualities. It is neither eloquent nor poetical nor coloured; he has not the imagination which transmutes sensations and impressions by the alchemy of art into a mysterious metal. He sees everything from the point of view of

reason, in black and white; there exist for him certain things which are true, and certain things which are false and therefore foolish, folly. Follies must be remedied, or killed by ridicule; that is to say, by reason. In this he is "French of the French" and lord of human sneers. He was, and always remained, more than a spoilt child, a naughty boy. He was a disintegrator. He nibbled like a tireless mouse with formidable corrosive teeth at the pillars of Society and the old régime, and left them, shaking and rotten, for the Revolution to pull down.

If it is true, as a Frenchman once said, that "la France n'est pas gouvernable," Voltaire is in part to blame. Nobody ever more successfully undermined the prestige of all possible government. He undermined the faith of the *bourgeoisie* in two things—government and religion. His philosophy was entirely practical. He was temperamentally irreligious and disrespectful; he preached disbelief, not only by precept, but by example; he made disrespect easy and popular; he taught the *bourgeoisie* and the half-educated not only how to do without religion, but how to laugh at it, how to treat it as something absurd. His god was a philosophical axiom acceptable to the reason; far more than Peter the Great, he was the first Bolshevik. His fundamental ideas and his philosophy are based on the all-importance of material welfare and progress. According to Mermilod, the cry of the masses is: "Vous m'avez ôté l'espérance du ciel, et la crainte de l'enfer; il ne me reste que la terre: Je l'aurai."

The cry might have been addressed to Voltaire.

The last word about Voltaire must be about his literary gifts. He was the greatest journalist who ever

lived, and one of the greatest letter writers. His literary output was inexhaustible, and he never wrote a bad sentence. He corresponded with men all over Europe, and ten thousand of his letters are still in existence. In history he wrote *Le Siècle de Louis Quatorze*, tragedies which, though devoid of beauty, can still be acted (*Zaire, Mérope, Alzire, Rome Sauvée, Tancrède*), comedies (*La Prude*), philosophy (*Le Dictionnaire philosophique*), light verse, innumerable articles, pamphlets, and broadsheets, and, finally, stories (*Zadig, Candide*).

If all Voltaire's work were to perish except his *Candide*, it would still put him in the first rank of all French writers. It was written as an answer to a letter of Rousseau's, in which Rousseau upbraided him for his atheism. In it he sums up all the evils to which the flesh is heir, and the disasters that can happen to man, laughs at them, and makes us share his laughter; but in the bitter after-taste that his laughter leaves there is something tonic, a cleansing common sense, "il faut cultiver notre jardin."

It is noteworthy that in French histories of literature little is said about Voltaire's style except that it is easy and *coulant*. Possibly most French writers write so well that they do not notice it. They notice bad writing, but they are like the man in Heine's story, who, on arriving in El Dorado, was surprised at picking up a piece of gold in the street, until he found that all the stones were made of gold. Heine said this was true of ideas in Germany. It is possibly true of good writing in France. It needed a stranger to notice the streets in El Dorado were full of gold; but even in the El Dorado of French literature there are no golden pebbles more scintillating, more seem-

ingly casual and common in their occurrence, nor more rare in their alloy, and precious in their artistic value, than the prose of Voltaire.

The Encyclopædia.—In the second half of the eighteenth century there came a new generation of philosophers. They raised a cry for reform; their watchwords were Reason and Humanity. The field of their operations was the undertaking of the Encyclopædia. The first volume of this gigantic work, which reviewed the activities of mankind in all its branches, was published in 1751, the last volume in 1752. Its conception and its final success were due to Diderot (1713-1784). It was modelled on Chambers' Encyclopædia, which had appeared in 1727; but it was Diderot who turned this dictionary, which was by no means entirely polemical, into a vehicle of philosophical propaganda. Diderot enlisted the help of writers such as Montesquieu, Buffon, Condillac, Marmontel, Helvétius, Raynal, Turgot, and Necker; lawyers, soldiers, engineers, doctors, the flotsam and jetsam of the social literary world, as well as all Grub Street. Diderot was the commander-in-chief of the operations; he drew up a definite and coherent plan of campaign, and he carried it out through all the fog of wordy warfare, and in spite of the babel arising from the heterogeneous composition of his troops. The Encyclopædia was a battering-ram brought to bear against the past—the old régime and all its institutions. The Encyclopædists were denounced in Parliament, not without some good ground, as a society which had been created to destroy religion and to set up materialism in its place, to inspire independence, and to foster the corruption of morals. Stripped of exaggeration, the comment is, in its essence, true; that

is to say, the first principles of the men who made the Encyclopædia were the sovereignty and supremacy of the reason. Apart from the Encyclopædia, Diderot is one of the great figures of the eighteenth century. He anticipated Rousseau in the preaching a return to Nature, and by a return to Nature Diderot meant three things: the absence of a divine principle in Nature, the wickedness and futility of all social institutions, the all-sovereignty of science. His art reflected his temperament and his philosophy. He was a naturalist, and he struck a new note in French literature. In addition to the Encyclopædia, which was his lifework, Diderot wrote plays, art, criticism (*Salons*), philosophical novels (*La Religieuse*, *Le Satiriste*), and carried on a vast correspondence. His masterpiece is, perhaps, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, in which the exuberance of Rabelais came to life again, and in which the romantic lyricism of Chateaubriand was foreshadowed.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). — The greatest name of the eighteenth century, equal in fame to that of Diderot, and certainly more far-reaching in effect, is that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He was born in Geneva, the son of a watchmaker. His education was neglected; he ran away from various professions—the law, engraving, a religious seminary. He was a vagabond till he died. He was at one time a footman, and later came under the protection of a Savoyard lady, Madame de Warens, who protected him for years. He taught music at Lyons; he composed music, and copied music for a living. He went to Paris, and later to the French Embassy at Venice. He quarrelled, returned to Paris, made the acquaintance of Diderot and Grimm. He married,

and was for some time protected by the Duke of Luxembourg. He ended by quarrelling with nearly everyone. He was obliged to go into exile, first to Switzerland, and then to England in 1766. There he quarrelled with Hume. He returned to Paris in 1770; he still copied music for a living. In 1777 he accepted the hospitality of the Marquis de Girardin at Ermenonville, where he died.

Rousseau is the key to modern French literature. He created romanticism and naturalism; but he did more. He was the first French writer to study the soul, to introduce the study of the soul into letters. We may even go further and say Rousseau is the key to all modern literature: in Rousseau's work there are the germs, not only of romantic naturalism, the romantic love of Nature of Byron, Chateaubriand, and Jean Paul; not only the germ of the realistic naturalism—that is to say, the love of the unadorned beauties of Nature which we find in the poems of Goethe and later in the novels of Georges Sand—but there are also in his works the seeds of the whole modern literature of introspection, analysis, and psychology. Rousseau was more modern than the so-called writers of realistic novels, the Goncourts, and Zola. He was more modern than Balzac. He anticipated Russian literature—the proud romanticism of Lermontov, the probings and questionings of Tolstoi, and the divings into the depths of the soul of Dostoyevsky; there are in Rousseau's confessions foreshadowings of Maxim Gorky and of the later Russian school, as well as of modern Frenchmen like Marcel Proust and André Gide.

In a sense, literature played a comparatively small part in the chequered and troubled life of Rousseau.

He was not an artist haunted by an impossible ideal of perfection, nor a craftsman absorbed in his craft; he was a poet and a seer.

Putting aside the *Confessions*, in which he tells the story of his life and of his soul, extenuating nothing, and which are as fresh, as fine, and as morbid to-day as when they were written, it is difficult, when we read his other works—the *Contrat Social*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and *Émile*—finely written as they are, to realise the passionate interest they aroused and the enormous power of their influence. It is easy to criticise the *Contrat Social* and to say that the *Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Émile* are long-winded novels full of tedious sentiment; but Rousseau was greater than his works, and in spite of his inconsistencies, his morbidness, and all his miserable failings, the influence of his great and suffering soul is still felt to-day. It is, perhaps, to the very contradictions of his nature, to the perplexing and perverse manner in which the elements were mixed in them, that the permanence of his influence is partly due. Never were more conflicting elements more strangely mixed in a human soul: candour, cynicism, pride, goodness, optimism, pessimism, irritability, disease, and a fundamental want of balance. Above all things, he had a capacity for suffering that has rarely been equalled, and which we do not find in such a degree elsewhere outside Russian literature.

Rousseau preached a return to Nature. Nature had made man good, free, and happy. Society had made him bad, servile, and miserable. Man must return to his natural state, or get as near to it as possible. The individual and society must both be regenerated, the individual by education, and society by the abolition

of inequality. The sole sovereignty in the state should be the welfare of the whole community; and if man was fundamentally good, there must necessarily be a God. Man must get back to Him.

Thus it is that the scepticism of the early writings of the eighteenth century and of Voltaire, which had proceeded from, or rather reacted against, the philosophy of Descartes as it is expressed in the psychology of Corneille, which preached and proclaimed the sovereignty of the human will, was now replaced by something which goes back to the Middle Ages—namely, the human soul in its relation to God—only with the elimination of theology and without what were thought to be its trappings and superstitions. This reaction will, in its turn, engender a new development in the modern Catholic writers (Claudél, etc.), who will, in their turn, proclaim that what are called trappings and superstitions are an inseparable part of a living organism, and are no more trappings than the leaves and blossoms are the trappings of a tree.

As an artist Rousseau had less influence in preaching a return to Nature than in returning to it himself. His practice was greater than his theory. He returned to Nature by living with it and describing it. Rousseau's writing was often as distorted as his life, but not when he describes Nature. There is a description in the *Confessions* of eating cherries in an orchard, which has the perspicuous reality of Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*. Rousseau not only revealed Switzerland and the Alps to the French, but he showed them the beauty of their fields and their valleys, and the "poetry of their daily prose":

"La cloche de la Messe et des vêpres me rappelait

un déjeuner, un goûter, du beurre frais, des fruits, du laitage.”

Rousseau is right in saying that the fourth book of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* ranks, for truth and sensibility, with *La Princesse de Clèves*, and the chapter describing the walk by the lake, when the separated lovers meet once more and evoke the past, is still wet with the tears with which it was written.

Rousseau brought back art into literature, just as he brought back the soul into philosophy and psychology into politics; and for this reason we find the influence of Rousseau everywhere, in all the branches of modern thought—in poetry, in fiction, as well as in politics and morals.

Besides Rousseau and Diderot, there were many other notable writers in the ranks of the philosophers. Duclos wrote *Considérations sur les mœurs de ce Siècle*. Grimm was an acute critic in his *Correspondance*; Condillac, a systematic psychologist, wrote a *Traité des sensations*; Turgot, a psychological economist, a *Traité de la formation et distribution des Richesses*.

Buffon (1707-1788).—In science the greatest name is that of Buffon. In his *Histoire Naturelle* he is, as a fine critic (M. Faguet) has observed, with Rousseau, the greatest poet of the eighteenth century. There is a Lucretian grandeur in his *Époques de la Nature*, and in his *Histoire Naturelle* he annexed science to literature, not only by his imagination, but also by his large and unpretentious utterance. In the exclusive domain of letters there are other illustrious names. Marmontel wrote *Contes moraux* and *Eléments de littérature*; Delille translated the *Georgics*; Gilbert wrote satires.

In the drama, Gresset revived comedy in verse, and

Diderot wrote prose drama; but the spirit of the age found a new and startling expression in the work of a writer of comedy.

Beaumarchais (1732-1799).—Beaumarchais, in *Le Barbier de Séville* and *Le Mariage de Figaro*, wrote, perhaps, the two finest French comedies that exist. But they were more than light comedies. They were momentous in their effect. The laughter of Figaro was as destructive as the trumpets of Joshua to the walls of Jericho. Voltaire had spent his life in undermining the pillars of the *Ancien Régime*. Beaumarchais finished the work with the light saw of his wit, and his handicraft was so amusing, and he worked so gaily, that nobody noticed it was destructive until the tumbrils were in the streets and a howling mob with pikes and in red caps were dancing on the ruins of the fallen columns.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW AGE

André Chénier (1762-1794).—The dragon's teeth of Voltaire and Rousseau bore their fruit in the French Revolution; but while the new order was seething like a torrent which has just broken a dam, a poet, heedless of the turmoil, was busy writing exquisite verse in which there was more poetry than in any of the verse of the century. This was André Chénier. His poetical theory was:

Sur des penses nouveaux faisons des vers antiques.

Only a few of his odes were published during his lifetime; his genius was revealed posthumously. His *Pensers Nouveaux* were far removed from the romantic dreams of the poets of the coming age. They were the scientific and materialist speculations of the Encyclopædist. But in his *Eclogues* he expressed not only the classical culture with which he was saturated, but a Greek feeling for Nature and art. He was by birth half Greek, and his classical poems are unartificial and unlike *Pastiches*. For it was out of his own fresh first-hand impressions of Nature that he wrought his antique verse. He recorded these impressions with the economy and grace of the writers of the Greek anthology and Tibullus. He went back to Ronsard and reintroduced classic forms into the language. His best-known poems are *La jeune Captive*, *l'Aveugle*, and *La jeune Tarentine*. He is, perhaps, most characteristic in the shorter epigrams, where he describes in the classical manner something which he has himself seen or experienced. For instance, the following epigram reads like a translation from the Greek (it is in reality an entry in his diary):

Fille du vieux pasteur, qui d'une main agile
Le soir emplis de lait trente vases d'argile,
Crains la genisse pourpre, au farouche regard,
Qui marche toujours seule et qui pâit à l'écart.

The romantic poets adopted Chénier, although never was a poet more classical, because they recognised the beauty of his verse and were captivated by his metrical experiments. He was guillotined at the age of thirty-two, leaving behind him, like Keats and Shelley, a tantalising promise. André Chénier is the

greatest name in French poetry between that of Racine and Lamartine.

In prose his contemporary, Bernardin de St. Pierre (1737-1814) wrote the immortal *Paul et Virginie*.

During the Revolution literature was confined to the speeches of the orators—Mirabeau, Barnave, Danton, Robespierre, and Marie Josef Chénier, who wrote the *Marseillaise*, one stanza of which is literature; but the art of letters was born again with the nineteenth century.

Chateaubriand (1768-1848).—The first writer to express the spirit of the new age was Chateaubriand. His marvellous utterance initiated a new movement both in prose and in verse. Chateaubriand, like other prose writers in the first half of the nineteenth century, was a poet. In this respect they are like Buffon and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The chief qualities of this new generation of prose writers are their sensibility and a love of Nature. Chateaubriand was a writer of epics in prose, a traveller, a polemical writer, an orator, and a diplomatist. His influence is immense. The fundamental thesis of his work, expressed in *Le Génie du Christianisme*, is that the truest beauty and poetry are to be found in Christianity. His prose epics are: *Les Natchez*, a picture of life among the Red Indians, and *Les Martyrs*, a picture of the conflict between the end of paganism and the beginning of Christianity. *Le Voyage en Amérique* and *l'Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* are books of travel. In his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* he tells the story of his life. He does this more or less in all his books. Like Byron, his only hero is himself; he cannot create other characters, like Shakespeare, or unwind the psychology of a soul. Like Byron, too, he is responsible for a whole series of

monotonous rhetorical and morally sick heroes: René is a near relation of Lara, and might have been godfather to Rolla. But, like Byron, his forte is description; there is something in him that is not himself, his vision of Nature; and that is magnificent. There is not a sentence of his descriptive work which is dated. He brought colour into French literature. In his descriptions he imparts the ecstasy which he feels, in a way that makes his pictures glow without losing their firmness of outline. His landscapes (and in this he resembles Ruskin) have the same effect as those of the great lyrical poets: "La charrue et la barque, à un jet de pierre l'une de l'autre, sillonnent la terre et l'eau. . . . Des sables de diverses couleurs, des bancs variés de coquillages, des varechs, des franges d'une écume argentée, dessinent la lisière blonde ou verte des blés." Or, to take a very different kind of landscape: "Monté aux colonnes du Parthénon avec l'aurore, j'ai vu le Cithéron, le mont Hymette, l'Acropolis de Corinthe, les tombeaux, les ruines, baignés dans une rosée de lumière dorée, transparente, volage, que réfléchissaient les mers, que répandaient comme un parfum les zéphyrs de Salamine et de Délos."

Phrases such as these, once they have been read, remain for ever in the memory.

The nature of Chateaubriand's influence was threefold: we find echoes of his pessimism divorced from religion in the poems of Alfred de Vigny; reflections of his descriptive power in the epic dreams of Victor Hugo, with their wealth of historical and especially of Gothic detail; and his historic vision, his power of making the past live, certainly acted like a spur of inspiration on **Thierry** (1795-1856), who reconstituted the epoch of the Merovingians, and possibly on

Michelet (1798-1874), who made history live for us through the medium of his lyrical, passionate, and ultra-sensitive temperament.

The history written at this period reads like lyric poetry, with the exception of that of Guizot and Thiers, who by their training as statesmen were firmly anchored in prosaic reality.

Chateaubriand's style is more imaginative and more musical than that of Rousseau at his best. He is a lord of language, and struck some of the noblest and most poignant chords on the many-stringed instrument of which he was a master.

The genius of Chateaubriand awakens like an enchanter's wand a whole cohort of great poets. Lamartine, Alfred de Vigny, and Victor Hugo were the greatest of the first generation of what are called the Romantic Poets.

Lamartine (1790-1869).—Lamartine is one of the most spontaneous of poets. Verse streamed from him in flowing improvisations which he could neither polish nor rewrite. There is nothing startlingly original in his ideas, no surprises in the craftsmanship of his verse, and a certain monotony in his choice of subject. But his verse is redeemed by its spontaneity. You feel in reading it that you have entered the realm of pure poetry. He is neither a thinker, nor a painter, nor an historian; but he writes absolute poetry. His themes are love, religion, and Nature; in a word, the eternal themes of poetry. In his *Méditations*, his *Harmonies*, and his *Recueils* he aroused emotions that for a long time had been dormant, and his verse went straight to the heart of those who in his generation were poetically inclined. In *Jocelyn* and *La Chute d'un Ange* he chose

larger themes and became more objective and symbolic. These two poems might be called the fragments of a vast spiritual epic on mortal destiny. They both have tedious passages, but they are both redeemed by great beauties. All his verse is the fruit of a fundamental optimism :

God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world.

The best known of all his poems is *Le Lac*. *Le Crucifix* and *Les Préludes* are equally characteristic of other chords of his lyre. Perhaps the finest example of his peculiar ecstasy is *Un Nom*.

Besides verse, Lamartine wrote *l'Histoire des Girondins*, a romantic history of the Revolution, as well as novels and autobiography.

The battle of romanticism, which was a revolt against classicism, was fought out in the theatre, and the militant members of the first generation of romantics were Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, and **Alexandre Dumas (1803-1870)**, who, besides plays, wrote the cycle of the *Mousquetaires*, the most amusing historical novels ever written, and the most popular book in the world—*Monte Cristo*. The theatrical campaign lasted thirty-five years. The watchword of romanticism was imagination; that of classicism, reason and observation. To a certain extent it was a battle of science against sense, and sometimes of "sound and fury signifying nothing" against sense. The classicists defended their citadel, which was the Théâtre Français, better by articles in the Press than by the stilted dramas they produced. The romantics produced nearly all the plays of Victor Hugo: *Hernani*, the first performance of which was the first

great battle, and a triumph for Victor Hugo; *Marion de Lorme*, *Ruy Blas*, and *Les Burgraves*; the plays of Vigny, *Othello*, *Le Maréchal d'Ancre*; and the plays of Dumas père, *Henri III. et sa Cour*, etc.; and, half-way between the two schools, Casimir Delavigne produced a series of successful plays—*Marino Faliero*, *Louis XI.*, *Les Enfants d'Édouard*, etc.

Eugène Scribe.—Eugène Scribe was one of the cleverest stage craftsmen and a genius in his craft, although devoid of ideas. His plays and librettos held the stage from 1830 to 1860.

Victor Hugo (1802-1885).—The dramas of Victor Hugo are rightly thought bombastic, stagey, declamatory, and sometimes puerile. But he has never ceased to hold the stage. He was the supreme master of stagecraft, and every now and then in his plays he reminds us that he is a great lyrical poet. Witness the scene in *Les Burgraves*, beginning:

Nous sommes en automne et nous sommes au soir,
which is as exquisite as anything he ever wrote.

But if the victories of the romantics were won on the stage, their most durable triumphs were achieved in the quieter region of lyric, epic, and meditative verse. In this region, the lifelong labour of a long life, the immense production, and the astounding gift of expression, the sublime heights and the deep gulfs of bathos, achieved by the genius of Victor Hugo, are startling features, not only in the literature of France, but in the literature of Europe.

Like Swinburne, Victor Hugo was a reed through which every breath of wind turned to music; but the chords of his lyre were more numerous and far more varied, and his self-control as an artist far greater.

As a writer of verse, and as a writer of verse only, as a wizard of words, he is unsurpassed by any European writers except Shakespeare and Pushkin. He touched every chord of the lyre; he evoked sublime and splendid visions, such as *Booz endormi* in *La Légende des Siècles*; lyrics with wings of gossamer that rival Shelley's for spontaneity and Catullus for tenderness (not for passion), in *Les Contemplations*, *Les Feuilles d'automne*, *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, and *Les Chants du crépuscule*; profound accents of grief, in such a poem as *À Villequier*; airy fancy and midsummer magic in *La Chanson des rues et des bois*, and *La Chanson d'Éviradnus*, one of the loveliest love lyrics ever written; sarcasm burnt on imperishable steel in *Les Châtiments*; pictures of Nature as true as those of J. F. Millet, as in a poem such as *Le Semeur*; meditative interpretation of Nature, as in that great poem *Tristesse d'Olympio*, in which he shows that, like the great poets, and like the great poets only, he can describe a landscape in one unforgettable line:

Les grands chars gémissants qui reviennent le soir.

What is unique in the work of Victor Hugo is the amazingly high standard of excellence he maintains throughout his career to the end of his life, in spite of the enormous extent of his output. In this he is the opposite of Wordsworth; the quality of actual workmanship, apart from lapses in taste, rarely falls below the mark in any of his work at any stage of his career. His faults are in the content, and are due to a want of humour, colossal vanity, and a lack of a sense of proportion. By his defects he is the least French of all writers, by his qualities the most French;

that is to say, he is at times excessively Celtic, and at others excessively Latin. But when every possible detraction has been made, Victor Hugo remains one of the most prodigal and marvellous scatterers of 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn' that the world has ever seen. In his prose, where, owing to the absence of rhyme, he is fighting with one hand tied behind his back, he uses his right hand magnificently, in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, *Les Misérables*, and *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*. His prose has the same effect as his verse—swift and sudden descents into bathos, and faults of taste arising from a lack of proportion.

Alfred de Vigny (1799-1863).—Alfred de Vigny is a complete antithesis to Victor Hugo. He has less imagination, and perfect taste. He thought and meditated profoundly, and there is never anything either shallow or silly in his work. There is not a shadow of rhetorical stage pose in his deep pessimism; he is not striving to air a broken heart to a sentimental audience. There is an immense sadness in his work which has sometimes a Lucretian grandeur, and always the high great style of a Leopardi, with whom he has affinities. Some of his poems—*La Bouteille à la mer*, *La Maison du Berger*, *La Colère de Samson*, and *Le Mont des Oliviers*—are in the first rank among the masterpieces in the *Salon Carré* of French literature.

Alfred de Musset (1810-1857).—Towards 1830 a second generation of romantics arose. Their chief representatives were Alfred de Musset and Théophile Gautier. No greater contrast could be imagined than the work of these two poets. Musset is entirely subjective and self-centred. He sees himself, and paints himself under every disguise—his illusions, his dis-

illusions, his gaiety, and his grief. The vicissitudes of Musset's fame are suggestive. At first he was considered a frivolous, fashionable writer, a naughty boy who was throwing stones into the windows of literature and deserved a whipping. His first efforts on the stage failed, and he gave up writing for the Parisian stage, which was, perhaps, fortunate, as, when he discarded all care for the demands of the actual stage and the taste of the contemporary public, he wrote the exquisite, witty, and sensitive comedies which are, perhaps, the most durable part of his work. They were first produced in St. Petersburg. *On ne badine pas avec l'amour*, *Les Caprices de Marianne*, *Fantasio*, and a longer historical play, *Lorenzaccio*, are, perhaps, the most precious part of his legacy.

"Avec l'esprit très gai, il avait l'âme saignante," one of his biographers said of him, and it is in these plays that you see at its fullest the result of this not uncommon blend of contrast.

Before his premature death, and for a long time afterwards, his verse enjoyed an immense vogue. Then came the reaction; a new generation, avid of careful workmanship and severe and solid craft, despised the easy, careless rhythms of Musset and laughed at his sentiment. But he remains one of the most lyrical of all French poets, one of the few really lyrical French poets. Short lyrics, such as the *Chanson de Fortunio*, *A St. Blaise*, *Sur une Morte*, and *Suzon*, are perfect; his longer lyrics, too—the famous *Nuits*, where you have accents of passion, dreams, grief, and desire, and a certain spontaneity of expression which are the fruits of genius, and are for ever out of reach of mere talent. Such poems may be eclipsed for a

time by new planets, but they cannot be deprived of their authentic sunlight.

Théophile Gautier (1811-1872).—Gautier was an artist, an objective artist, and in his own limits original and first-rate. Like Rossetti, he was a painter before he was a writer, but, unlike Rossetti, he discarded painting for literature. He was neither lyrical nor rhetorical, nor greatly imaginative. According to his own definition, he was a man “pour qui le monde extérieur existe,” and in recording impressions of the exterior world he was a past-master. He was more like an engraver than a painter; he preferred to copy art rather than Nature. His precise ideas and his direct vision led him away from romanticism, and he came to be a bridge between the romantics and the Parnassians in verse, and the naturalists in prose. His most famous book is *Émaux et Camées* (1852). The title is the best appreciation and criticism of his work; his verse has the richness of enamel and the perfection of a carved cameo. He achieved miracles in what he called “les transpositions de l’art,” expressing music in terms of colour, and colour in terms of music. As usually happens, the numerous disciples who imitated this achieved nothing more than mannerism in the attempt and failure at emulating the master.

Madame de Staël (1766-1817).—To return to the prose of the romantic movement, Madame de Staël, contemporary of Chateaubriand, who died long before he did, contributed to the romantic movement in her novels *Delphine* and *Corinne*, which were interesting without ever being moving, and still more by her book on Germany, *De l’Allemagne*, which opened the doors for Frenchmen on the romantic literature of Germany.

The principal historians have already been mentioned, and the philosophers, no less than they, were unable to escape the contagion of the bright romantic strain.

Lamennais (1782-1854), in his *Essai sur l'Indifférence* and his *Paroles d'un Croyant*, supplied the romantic poets with ideas. In the nineteenth century, and in the rush of the romantic movement and its consequences, the novel took a place of prime importance.

The French Novel.—The French novel, which had begun with the unwieldy romances of Mlle. de Scudéri, produced a masterpiece in the seventeenth century in Madame de la Fayette's *Princess de Clèves*, and gave a foretaste of realism at the end of the eighteenth century in the *Liaisons dangereuses* of Laclos, and of the romanticism of the nineteenth century in the *Nouvelle Héloïse* of Rousseau, became frankly romantic in the prose romances of Victor Hugo, Gautier (*Le Capitaine Fracasse*), and still more so in the novels of Georges Sand.

Georges Sand (1804-1876), like Gautier, wrote lyrical novels. The most famous of these are *Lélia*, *Indiana*, *Valentine*, and *Mauprat*. *Indiana* was published in 1832, and *Lélia* in 1833, and from that time onwards she produced about two novels a year besides stories, biography, and criticism. Later on her outlook and her style matured, and shed their romantic trappings. Perhaps the most enjoyable of her works to modern readers are her rustic idylls, *La Mare au Diable*, *La Petite Fadette*, and *François le Champi*, in which reality is reflected in the poetic vision without being distorted or falsified. Georges Sand is one of the few French writers who can repro-

duce the talk of countryfolk. These stories prove that Georges Sand was by nature and temperament a realist, but, owing to the atmosphere of the epoch in which she lived, she could not help, except in these short idylls, looking at the world through the optic glass of romanticism. This is also true of Balzac.

Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850).—Balzac has often been claimed as the founder of the realistic novel; yet critic after critic has pointed out that the optic glass through which Balzac observed life magnified the objects he saw and distorted them to a more fantastic degree than that which was used by the romantics. Yet Balzac is a realist in this sense: what he observed were facts; what he saw he disguised with the utmost minuteness and in the most vivid colours. He had, besides the faults common to so many of the romantics—a want of taste, the tendency to exaggerate, to falsify, to pile detail on detail—others which many of them were without—an indifference to Nature (here he is the opposite of Georges Sand), and a pompous, inflated style directly he set out to attempt fine writing. Between the years of 1829 and 1850 Balzac produced his *Comédie humaine*. *The Comédie humaine* is a long series of novels, a vast panorama of French life and of the age in which Balzac lived. Some of the novels deal with town life, others with the provinces. Every class of society is represented, and the characters flit from book to book. Balzac created a world of his own. He was not only romantic in his treatment; half of his work is incurably and exaggeratedly romantic in subject. Sometimes it is fantastically and outrageously melodramatic. *Une ténébreuse Affaire* and *La dernière Incarnation de Vautrin* are sensational novels written by a man of

genius. His villains are colossal monsters, and his high society as unreal as that described in *Jane Eyre*. But to leave his limitations and to turn to his qualities, in his own province he is incomparable; that is to say, in creating types of men to middle station born. His characters are types; not subtle, contradictory, many-sided individuals, but types, dominated as a rule by some *faculté maîtresse*, some overwhelming, irresistible, ruling passion, such as jealousy (*La Cousine Bette*), avarice (*Eugénie Grandet*), paternal love (*Goriot*); but Balzac's types, painted with so broad a brush and set in so minutely described, detailed, and living surroundings, are real and alive. Balzac was a bad man of business, but he knew enough about the machinery of business to describe the appearance, actions, and motives of men of business, which is rare in an author of genius. There is something of Dickens in Balzac; they both looked at life, and at life only, and their eyes magnified and exaggerated everything they saw; but they were able to transmit the power of their vision to their readers; they both could evoke extraordinarily real surroundings, exteriors and interiors. They both created a whole world of human beings. Balzac could do this in the highest degree. Nobody ever made an interior more living. The boarding-house where le Père Goriot stayed, the printing-press of the Père Séchard, the house in *Ursule Mirouet*. He makes the furniture live. To begin to read a book by Balzac is often to many readers an effort; but once he has caught your attention he holds you with his glittering eye, like the Ancient Mariner, and you cannot escape until you have heard the story to the end. His masterpieces are *Le Père Goriot* (a modern *King Lear*), *Eugénie Grandet*, *La Cousine Bette*, *Le Cousin Pons*,

Illusion Perdues, *César Birotteau*, *Ursule Mirouet* and *Un Curé de Village*. In common with Georges Sand, he has the faculty of forcing you to believe, as long as you are reading it, that what you are reading, however improbable it is, actually happened; but whereas Georges Sand sometimes deals with the improbable, Balzac often revels in the monstrously fantastic, and encroaches on the province of Eugène Sue and Dumas *père* in his use of plot, passion, and murder. His police agents change their disguise more often than Sherlock Holmes. But whatever may be said in detraction of Balzac, the colossal scale of his genius has never been doubted. A French critic once said of Musset: "Du génie, aucun talent." This is still truer of Balzac. Never was sheer genius more forcibly revealed.

Béranger (1780-1857).—Throughout the romantic movement there was a series of writers who escaped the influence of the romantic movement; they quietly carried on the traditions of the eighteenth century, and remained obstinately Latin. In verse, Béranger. Béranger was a writer of songs; he was far removed from all the literary schools and circles; but none of the literary or even the inspired poets, such as Victor Hugo, rivalled him in popularity. His songs were witty and popular, commonplace in idea, and the complete expression of the sentiments of the average French *bourgeois*. Flaubert calls him "*un astre bourgeois*."

None the less, his songs are full of action; they are as well constructed for effect as the *Fables* of La Fontaine, and sometimes they have the authentic *Volkston*.

Joseph de Maistre (1754-1821), in his *Soirées de Pétersbourg*, was a classicist.

Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870), in his *Chronique de Charles IX*, *Colomba*, *Carmen*, and *La Vénus d'Ille*, was entirely classical, a writer of witty, lapidary prose, and a supreme master of the short story.

Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869).—Sainte-Beuve, the father and the supreme lord of modern French criticism, began as a godfather of romanticism; but after 1830 he deserted the romantics. He wrote the *History of Port Royal*, in which he painted a large and influential section of French society during the earlier years of the reign of Louis XIV., and analysed one of the most important spiritual and intellectual influences that have ever been brought to bear on French literature—Jansenism. His *Causeries du Lundi*, critical essays and studies which originally came out in a magazine, and ultimately formed a long series of volumes, are studies of individual souls and portraits of character. Sainte-Beuve does not confine himself to literary topics or types, and there are no national or political frontiers to the provinces of his criticism. He writes about Mary Queen of Scots, Goethe, the poet Cowper, General Joubert, Racine, Alexandre Dumas, Wordsworth, ministers, men of letters, men and women of the world, Englishmen, Germans. He is one of the supreme representatives of French intelligence at its most acute, and his *Causeries* are an inexhaustible storehouse of enchanting reading.

In the domain of the novel there were two great writers impervious to romantic influences: Constant and Stendhal.

Benjamin Constant (1767-1830). — Benjamin Constant wrote philosophy in *Sur les religions*. His novel, *Adolphe*, which appeared in 1816, was an epoch-making work and a landmark in the history of French

fiction. It is semi-autobiographical and analytical: the study of the throes and pangs of a dying passion. His form was classical; but by his subject-matter with its acute psychological analysis he belonged to the future, and was a precursor of a whole race of analytical novelists.

Stendhal (Henri Beyle) (1783-1842).—Henri Beyle, who wrote and became famous under the name of Stendhal, was a disciple of Condillac and the Encyclopædists. He goes back to the days before Rousseau. His style is naturally, and purposely as well as naturally, bare, precise, and devoid of ornament. His sole study is mankind and the human heart. He had no love of landscape and no wish to describe it. He focussed his talent on human character and on the analysis of motives. *La Chartreuse de Parme* is the study of an Italian soul and of Italian life. It begins with a narrative of the Battle of Waterloo which has never been surpassed for realistic truth. *Le Rouge et le Noir* is a study of a French society which grew up after the Revolution; it tells us as much about French life, the secret springs and motives of action of the men of that period, as Balzac does in the whole of the *Comédie humaine*. Stendhal was a man of action as well as a writer. He took part in the retreat from Moscow, during which he shaved every day. He also wrote some criticism, *Les Mémoires d'un Touriste*, and *Henri Brulard*, an unfinished autobiography. His influence has proved great, but was a long time in making itself felt. He was before his time. "I shall be read," he said, "in 1880." He might have added: "I shall be read in England in 1927."

The romantic movement, which came to an end about 1850, was followed by a reaction, which took the

shape of positivism in philosophy, realism in fiction, and the return to concrete themes and chastened form in verse. The new novelists called themselves realists, the new poets Parnassians. Among the philosophers the two great names of Renan and Taine overshadow the others.

Ernest Renan (1823-1892).—Renan wrote the *Origines du Christianisme* (six volumes), of which the best known and the least satisfactory, to modern readers, at least, is the *Vie de Jésus*. The finest are, perhaps, *Marc Aurèle* and *l'Antichrist*. He also wrote *l'Histoire du Peuple d'Israël*, many philosophical studies, metaphysical and scientific dialogues, as well as some enchanting autobiographical sketches, *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse*, followed later by *Feuilles détachées*.*

Renan was a great scholar and one of the greatest masters of French prose. Like Pascal and Newman, he did not bother about *how* to say a thing; he busily wrote down what he had to say, as clearly as possible. The result is an exquisite style. He was brought up to be a priest, but he lost his faith, and after much heart-burning he left the seminary and devoted himself to study. He became one of the great heresiarchs. But though he lost his faith and expounded his disbelief in the miraculous nature of Christianity, he never ceased to respect religious faith, nor to regard it with anything but sympathy. In his habit of mind he remained a priest to the end of his life.

Jules Lemaître, in summing up Renan's work, talks of "those large six volumes of the *Origins of Chris-*

* He translated the Book of Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon from the Hebrew.

tianity, let alone *l'Histoire du Peuple d'Israël*, of which one-half consists of hypotheses and the other half of irony." Is not that, in the long run, he asks, "un peu décevant"? It is a true criticism; to the present generation of Frenchmen, and especially to those who have been through the furnace of the war, Renan's message to-day seems uninspiring; and they are irritated and fatigued by his irony; and his blind belief in German science and the "higher criticism" seems to them more old-fashioned and superstitious than the dogmas which Renan discarded with so great a laceration of mind.

But, as Lemaître added, "Heureusement il nous reste les *Souvenirs* et la *Réforme intellectuelle et morale*," which is equivalent to saying that, when all is said and done, there remains, happily for us, some of the finest prose in the French language.

Renan was a positivist; he believed in science, and in science only; but he toyed with metaphysical conjectures and hypotheses which are fascinating and suggestive. In these writings, which he calls his dreams, as well as in *Les Origines*, he displayed, not only the suppleness of his intelligence, but a sensitive imagination, an incomparable grace, a charm that is sometimes cloying, and an irony which is sometimes teasing. Yet it is as a stylist that he will live; for beauty, delicacy, and perspicuity of language there is no finer passage in the French language than that in the *Souvenirs d'Enfance* beginning "Je suis né déesse aux yeux bleus, de parents barbares, chez les Cimmériens bons et vertueux qui habitent au bord d'une mer sombre, hérissée de rochers, toujours battue par les orages. On y connaît à peine le soleil; les fleurs sont les mousses marines, les algues et les coquillages

coloriés qu'on trouve au fond des baies solitaires. Les nuages y paraissent sans couleur, et la joie même y est un peu triste; mais des fontaines d'eau froide y sortent du rocher, et les yeux des jeunes filles y sont comme ces vertes fontaines où, sur des fonds d'herbes ondulées, se mire le ciel." His style at his best is so transparent and elusive that someone said of it:

"C'est admirablement fait et on ne sait pas avec quoi c'est fait."

Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893).—Taine was the antithesis of Renan. He wrote *Les Origines de la France contemporaine*, a history of the Revolution, and various philosophical works, the most important of which are *l'Intelligence*, *Les Philosophes français du XIX^e Siècle*, a history of English literature, and *Thomas Graindorge*, a biting satire.

Taine had a passion for abstraction. Every man, he said, can be summed up in three pages, and those three pages in three lines. He looked upon everything as a mathematical problem. He said about a sonata of Beethoven: "C'est beau comme un syllogisme." As a philosopher he was a positivist; his creed was an inexorable determinism. In writing history, Taine laid it down as an axiom that man was always the result of his race, his environment, and his epoch. He completed this theory with that of the ruling faculty. He always searched for this ruling faculty, and when he thought he had found it he laid stress on it, to the exclusion of all others.

Whereas Renan looked upon the world with an optimism about which he protested far too much to be altogether convincing, Taine was a pessimist, and he, too, protested just a shade too much. He disbelieved in mankind and in all religion. He arraigned

humanity in the dock, and his verdict was "Guilty." Taine's pessimism is more convincing than Renan's optimism; in *Thomas Graindorge* he is staggered by the bestiality of man and the folly of woman. But Taine had poetical imagination and deep and violent emotions; Lemaître calls him a *poète-logicien*. As an artist he was deeply romantic, and free neither from the influence nor from the faults of the romantic school. His vision was at times lurid, his outlines exaggerated. Taine was the high priest of the cult of misanthropy and pessimism which swept over French literature during his lifetime. The mood of which he was so powerful an exponent is reflected in French literature from 1870 to 1880 in fiction and in the drama. If he is partly responsible for this mood, he must also be partly credited with the subsequent reaction.

Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889).—Fustel de Coulanges is another great writer who, like Renan and Taine, acquired a permanent place in French literature by writing history. But whereas Renan used history as a vehicle for philosophy, and Taine used it as an operating theatre to dissect the animal Man, Fustel de Coulanges confined himself to the sphere of history proper—to depicting and explaining the past. In his *Cité antique* he studies religious institutions in ancient societies.

Théodore de Banville (1823-1891) and the Parnassians.—The romantic movement is said to have come to an end in 1860; there was, nevertheless, a third generation of romantics, of which the most brilliant is an enchanting poet, Théodore de Banville, an astonishing juggler of rhyme, riding on a spangled Pegasus and leaping through shining paper hoops of

fancy. Then came the so-called Parnassians, pessimists in outlook and obsessed with a passion for form.

Leconte de Lisle (1820-1894) saturated with Indian literature and Oriental fatalism, expressed himself in terms of marble and gold. **Sully Prudhomme** on his ivory lyre touched grave meditative chords; he wrote psychological and philosophical verse and some beautiful elegies. **François Coppée** celebrated the joys and sorrows of the humble, and wrote well enough for his art to escape notice. Louis Bouilhet was a romantic wolf in Parnassian clothing and left some wonderful verses. **Heredia** wrote a sheaf of impeccable sonnets.

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867).—Baudelaire's pessimism was Christian and the reverse of that of Leconte de Lisle; it was based on the conviction of sin. He added some new chords to the French lyre. His verse is exotic, artificial, and sometimes affected, both in the choice of his subjects as well as in the manner of his expression; but he made the alexandrine sound with a resonance such as had not been heard since the clarions of Corneille. His vision had splendour and sometimes his evocations are magical; for instance, in a line such as this:

l'Aurore grelottante en robe rose et verte.

Baudelaire is considered by some of the still existing literary groups as one of the greatest poets in all French literature. Even if this is an exaggerated view, few Frenchmen have denied that he is a great poet. There is one great exception to this rule; Brunetière, a great critic, denied it with vehemence.

The Symbolists.—The Symbolists, who justly claimed descent from a contemporary of the early

romantics, **Gérard de Nerval (1810-1855)**, were a group of writers who succeeded the Parnassians and who rebelled and reacted against the concrete substance and rigid outlines of Parnassian verse.

Just as Malherbe fought for the cause of lucidity, common sense, and order, which he thought had suffered at the hands of the *Pléiade*, the Symbolists attacked what seemed to them dry, prosaic and oversensible. They aimed at liberty, music, the lyrical cry; intimacy and individuality in matter, and freedom of technique in form.

Their efforts and effect began to be manifest in 1885. The greatest names the movement can boast of are those of Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé.

Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) was one of the greatest French lyric poets that had arisen since Villon. But Verlaine is only a symbolist in the sense that he is lyrical in inspiration and that his emotions are poetical. He, too, added a chord to the French lyre, a certain childlike simplicity, a vague and wistful wonder, an intangible elusive music (that reminds us a little of Coleridge and a little of Heine), and an indefinable poignancy that is entirely his own.

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), the acknowledged chief of the symbolist school, was an incomplete artist. He produced a small sheaf of beautifully sounding and exquisitely finished verse, in which some critics discern a profound significance and others nothing at all.

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1898), "the marvellous boy," whose career is more fantastic than any romance, is generally classed with the symbolists, owing chiefly to a famous poem, *Le Bateau Ivre*, which he wrote when still a boy. But in reality he is

apart from all schools; he was himself and himself only. In style, both in prose and verse, a super-classic, a seer, and a mystic: "mystique à l'état sauvage." When his literary career had scarcely begun he turned his back on literature irrevocably, cut it out of his life, and lived a life of exploration, business, travel, and hardship, and died after losing a leg in a hospital. His posthumous influence on writers of verse was and is still great.

Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880).—The symbolist poets proceeded from the Parnassians, just as the Parnassians proceeded from romanticism, although they despised it and fought against it. In prose the same thing happened. A realistic fiction came into being, written by prose writers who had been bitten by poetry and influenced by the romantic. Flaubert, whose *Madame Bovary* was published in 1857, is a perfect example of the realist who has not washed off all the dyes of romanticism. Some of his work—his *Salamambo* and *Tentation de saint Antoine*—can be said to be as romantic, but in a different way, as the extravagance of Balzac.

Madame Bovary is one of the great masterpieces of fiction in the nineteenth century; it is the story of a romantic *bourgeoise*. The observation is minute, the style restrained, full of under-statement and of muffled splendour. In telling the story of Madame Bovary, Flaubert told the story of hundreds of women (some people say of all women). Certainly the story of all Ibsen's heroines, in showing the suffering, disaster, and havoc caused by the introduction of romantic ideas into everyday life by the mediocre and the vulgar. What he shows is pitiable, miserable, degraded; but we are able to pity the profound

de la Littérature française is considered a masterpiece. At the death of Renan and Taine he was the only great critic who continued to direct French thought with authority.

A contrary trend of manner, if not wholly of thought, finds exquisite expression in the criticism of **Jules Lemaître (1833-1914)**, who did nothing else than put into practice Anatole France's axiom, that criticism is the adventures of a soul among masterpieces. In his *Contemporains* and his *Impressions de Théâtre*, Lemaître wrote some of the most varied and fresh criticism since that of Sainte-Beuve, in the purest, most limpid, and most Latin French. Other critics are Emile Faguet and Anatole France himself, who, in his criticism, for style and charm perhaps excels them all, although his critical output was slender.

This brings us down to the nineties, and to the generation that preceded the war, a period rich in production, both in prose and verse. There are the psychological novels of **Paul Bourget**, the novels of Prévost, Rod, Bordeaux, René Bazin, Rosny, Estaunié, Boylesve, Henri de Régnier, Jérôme and Jean Tharaud, and Gérard d'Houville; the prose and verse of Richepin, the verse of Moréas, of Haraucourt Jammes, Rodenbach, Vanhœren, Samain, Henri de Régnier, Madame de Noailles, and Paul Claudel; the exotic impressions of **Pierre Loti**, the novels, satires, and stories of Anatole France and André Gide.

Anatole France (1844-1924).—Anatole France, whose reputation is at this moment suffering an eclipse, is nevertheless one of the literary glories of the nineteenth century. His style is exquisitely elegant, cunningly careful, and artfully artless; his irony, which the present generation finds fatiguing, is some-

times as decisive as that of Voltaire and more delicate. His profound knowledge of human beings, his subtlety, an intuition like second sight, his culture and grace of expression, his economical characterisation, his sardonic fun, especially in his satires of contemporary life, *l'Orme du Mail*, etc., give him a place among the great satirists and writers of French prose.

An antithesis to Anatole France is to be found in the prose of the nationalist writer, **Maurice Barrès**.

Among the historians we have **Lavis**, Aulard, and d'Haussonville; in philosophy, Boutroux, **Bergson**, and Ribot; in the drama, François de Curel, Hervieu, Lavedan, Bataille, Becque, Brioux, Porto-Riche, Maurice Donnay, Capus, Bernstein, Tristan Bernard, and **Edmond Rostand**, the author of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *l'Aiglon*.

After 1900 the wave of the new reaction began to gather itself up in the distance. **Marcel Proust** published *Du côté de chez Swann* in 1913, but at first attracted no attention. Claudel's dramas (*L'Annonce faite à Marie*, 1912) attracted little notice, Valéry's verse, which appeared in reviews between 1889 and 1898, almost none. Then came the war, and not one, but a multitude of waves, broke on the sands of French literature, bringing with them all sorts of flotsam and jetsam, a multitude of objects, some of which are perhaps weeds, others perhaps unvalued stones. We are too near to them now to see, too excited by the joy at their discovery to appreciate or to appraise them.

As far as one can judge at present, the last great wave has brought a reaction against what is romantic in form and materialist in matter. The new gems still seem to belong to the two great categories into

which from the earliest times French literature has been divided, and which, for want of better names, we have called Celtic and Latin. On the beach, in the hoard that has been deposited by the last great wave since the war, we pick up gems, in some of which we seem to discern the dark, enigmatic hues of Rousseau, and others which are light, bright, and polished as the golden metal of Voltaire; and some of them seem to have the iridescence and purity of Racine's pearls.

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